SHORT STORIES

No. 761.] Week ending August 1st, 1903. [Price One Penny.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 761.] Week Ending August 1st, 1903. [One Penny.

TWICE-CROSSED FATES.

The Story of a "Boy and Girl" Friendship, and what it Meant at a Strange Crisis in a Woman's Life.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

Crossing the First.

"You know that we are having a visitor to-night, Dallas?"

"No, Mrs. Chaloner."

Dallas East turned from the verandah-rail upon which she had been leaning. She was a tall, graceful brunette, with a quick, almost haughty glance, and a clever, thin-lipped mouth. Her short skirts and the brown locks, caught back from her temples with ribbon, were those of a girl still in the schoolroom. But there was something in her shrewd, sensitive, clear-cut features that stamped them with a look of womanhood. They bore the lines of habitual reserve, even of resentment.

Mrs. Chaloner leant back among her cushions and rocked indolently in the bent-wood lounge-chair that held both her and them.

She had laid down her novel, and the afternoon sunshine stole in at a corner of the verandah to illuminate the carefully-waved grey hair, regular white teeth, and wrinkled, yellowish complexion, as if they had been under the theatrical limelight.

"Sir Francis Brunton," she said, "is coming down from Westminster with Mr. Chaloner for the week-end."

"Oh!" answered Dallas, gazing abstractedly out over the green lawns that, shaded by a great old tree or two, swept away to the edge of the silver Thames; "he has been here quite often lately. But you would scarcely know he was about the place. What with his fishing and his Parliamentary papers, he doesn't seem to have a thought to spare for ordinary mortals and their doings."

A slow smile contracted her companion's acute, selfish countenance.

"That's where you're wrong, Dallas," she observed. "Sir Francis has had a good many thoughts to spare for somebody—and that somebody no less a person than yourself."

"Me!" exclaimed Dallas, and added disdainfully, "Oh, I suppose I get on his nerves. I do on most people's."

Mrs. Chaloner rocked calmly. "You do indeed," she retorted, "but it is not Sir Francis' nerves you have contrived to affect, but his heart. He has spoken to Mr. Chaloner about you—amazing as it seems, he is genuinely smitten with you—he wants you to be Lady Brunton."

Dallas stood as if turned to stone.

"Lady Brunton," she repeated. "He wants me to—to marry him! Oh," she added hastily, "I—I don't love him; I—I've never taken enough notice of him to like or dislike him. And he's ever so much older than I am."

"As thirty-eight is to eighteen," said the other; "but no matter, I was sure you would look at it in that light. That is why I told Mr. Chaloner to explain to Sir Francis that I thought it wise to inform you of his proposal myself. There are several considerations that you ought to have a chance of weighing before you commit yourself, in your usual impulsive fashion, against the offer."

The younger woman knitted her brows. "I suppose you are going to remind me," she said hotly, "that I am a pauper on your bounty?"

Mrs. Chaloner winced. "I am going to do nothing of the sort," she rejoined, "I am only going to point out to you that neither Mr. Chaloner nor I are able to provide you with a dowry, and that, should we die before you marry, you will be penniless. Every shilling we have passes to a distant cousin."

She regarded tolerantly the pale, proud face of Dallas East.

"Of course," she continued, "it is not your fault or ours that your mother's property barely realised sufficient for your education and upbringing. Women should never dabble in business; your mother had quite an absurd idea of what her investments were worth. Though she was my friend I must say that she was shockingly deficient in common-sense, or, for instance, she would never have married your father."

The listener bit her lip, and her brown fingers caught nervously at each other.

Mrs. Chaloner rose—the sun was inconveniencing her.

"If you accept Sir Francis," she said, "your future will be secure. You will have wealth, position, a title, and a husband who is embarked already upon a distinguished political career. If you were anything else but what you are—a sentimental, self-willed child—I should have come to you and congratulated you on the astonishing piece of good luck that has brought a future Cabinet Minister to the feet of a dowerless schoolgirl. As it is, I do my duty in warning you of the folly and ingratitude you are quite capable of committing in refusing him."

Dallas East confronted her critic, her eyes blazing, her limbs rigid.

"Have you finished?" she said fiercely.

Mrs. Chaloner shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes," she replied, "and if your expression does not belie your thoughts, Dallas, you had better not begin."

With which dexterous thrust she stepped through one of the French windows into the drawing-room behind her. Dallas watched her with a hard, stern anger.

"It's true," she murmured. "I am a pauper! All I have is myself, and so I must sell myself or go on sponging on people who make my existence odious to me. Oh, why wasn't I born where I could have learnt to earn my own

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living, instead of having to stand mute out of an intolerable gratitude and hear my father and mother insulted!"

A sob choked her utterance, and descending hurriedly the verandah steps, she darted across the lawn, to thread the winding pathways of the riverside garden, and at last to fling herself down in a grassy corner sheltered by tall privet-hedges.

She lay thus for some time, and then a ripple of clear, bird-like notes fell on her ear. They were too melodious for the voice of any feathered songster, and the air was an operatic one, given with a multitude of delicate variations. The notes were those of a flute, played as that abused instrument is but rarely played out of a great orchestra.

Dallas started up on to her knees, brushing back her brown locks. The music came from the other side of the hedge; she sprang to her feet, went to the leafy wall, and putting her fingers into her mouth, whistled expertly.

A moment more and the musician had leapt through a gap in the bushes, his flute in one hand, a dewy damask rose in the other. A slight, boyish, hatless figure, grey-eyed, and with crisp, brown curls, his grave yet handsome face showed that shy sensibility which goes to form the composition of the true musician.

"I'm so glad I've found you," he said. "I've been playing up and down the hedge for an hour or more. See, there is another of my roses out." And he gave her the splendid scented flower.

Dallas put it to her nostrils and stood with drooped head, drinking deep draughts of the odour.

"Thank you, Kenneth," she murmured, "it is very, very beautiful, and they are larger and darker this year. The bush is improving."

The flute-player paused, watching her. "That is because it is blossoming for you," he said. "Do you know, Dallas, it is just a year to-day since we first spoke to one another over the fence? We have known each other for a whole year."

"A year," repeated the girl slowly. "How time flies! But I don't think I know you all the same, Kenneth; you appear and disappear at the gap in the fence as if you had the gift of becoming invisible. If it wasn't that I could see your house from my bedroom window I should fancy it was all an enchanted wood on the other side, and that you were a fairy prince disguised as a wandering musician."

The flute-player shook his head, frowning. "There is nothing to know," he rejoined, "except that I am Kenneth Haviland, an invalid, living alone with my nurses and tutor. I am ordered to make no friends, I wish to make none, I have none that I wish you to meet."

He broke off suddenly; she had raised her own head and he had seen her pale, tear-stained features.

"So they have been at you again," he commented gloomily. "What a shame—what a cruel shame!"

Dallas tried to smile. "Oh, it's not all that bad," she replied, "not this time. They really imagine they are trying to do me a service. What do you think—there's somebody wants to marry me!"

Kenneth Haviland had dropped his instrument. He bent and picked it up. When he spoke his voice was low and unsteady.

"Is there?" he said.

Dallas nodded, still inhaling the perfume of the rose.

"Yes," she answered, "there is someone rich, titled, not very old, and, they say, awfully in love with me. He has asked my guardian about it, and he's coming to-day, I suppose, to pop the question."

Dallas laughed a trifle extravagantly. The other was fingering the stops of his flute.

"What do you think I ought to do about it?" she continued; "you're the only friend I've got, Kenneth. You know how I'm situated. Ought I to stay and be a pauper on the Chaloners' bounty or marry a man I don't love?"

Kenneth Haviland stooped over his instrument, hiding his face. "I'd rather you didn't ask me, Dallas," he said.

Dallas sighed.

"You are my friend," she retorted, "and you ought to help me. I've got to make up my mind at once. Heaven knows I can't be much worse off than I am with Mrs. Chaloner always reminding me of my pauperism, and Mr. Chaloner scowling over the hotel-bills when we go away."

The flute-player looked up. "What—what is he like," she was asked, "this man they want you to marry?"

Dallas considered. "Oh," she said reflectively, "very nice, nicer than I have quite realised, I fancy. He's a member of Parliament, not young, but not old, to be as successful as he has been. He's dark and tall, clean-shaven, and rather legal-looking. His eyes are blue and kind, and he's very good-tempered and fond of fishing. That's all, I believe, except that he's very rich."

Kenneth Haviland screwed and unscrewed his instrument. He had long, white, delicate hands, like those of an actress.

"You—you don't love him?" he said, in a low tone.

"I don't love anyone," confessed Dallas simply. "I'd rather have a friend like you, Kenneth, than all the husbands under the sun."

A sort of shudder ran over Kenneth Haviland. "I wish you hadn't said that, Dallas," he exclaimed; "I'm not fit to be your friend. If you knew me as I am you would hate me."

"What nonsense!" cried Dallas; "I do know you. I don't know much about you, but that's a different thing. If I didn't trust you, would I ask you what I ought to do?"

The same singular species of shudder passed over the flute-player. "Do?" he said huskily. "Do whatever will make you happy."

He stopped—a harsh voice from the other side of the fence was calling him by his name. He held out his hand. Dallas took it—he had never shaken hands with her before.

"Good-bye," he added, "I shan't see you again. I'm going away—that was what I wanted to tell you."

Dallas cried out in dismay, but he motioned to her to be silent, and with a convulsive grasp of her soft fingers, sprang into the gap in the hedge.

"Good-bye," he said; "I'm glad you called me your friend. I hope you will be happy." And he vanished without a second backward glance into the depths of the plantation beyond.

Puzzled, Dallas retraced her steps through the garden of her own house. The mystery that had always hung about her next-door neighbour seemed suddenly to have acquired a darker, colder shadow—something more than the shadow of the abrupt farewell that had severed their youthful friendship.

The summer breeze dried a tear or two on Dallas' cheek, but she was very sad—sadder than when she had come out for the "good cry" that the sound of Kenneth Haviland's flute had interrupted.

She halted in her abstracted sauntering and looked up. Someone was walking beside her—someone with clear blue eyes, a kindly, "legal" countenance, and a mouth whose firm, quizzical lines were unwontedly nervous.

"Good—good evening, Sir Francis," she said, and paused. Her companion paused too, and drew a long breath.

"Dallas," he began hesitatingly, "Mrs. Chaloner has—has said something to you, hasn't she? I'm afraid it must have startled you. But I have seen for some time that you are not happy here. Forgive my putting it so bluntly."

"It's the truth," observed Dallas, wondering why she had never noticed how bright and kind his eyes really were and how caressing his grave, strong tones could sound.

"Yes," he said, "my poor, lonely little Dallas, it is the truth. Do you think that you could let me try to make you a little happier, Dallas? I am not so old as you may imagine me, dear, and I have a young heart in my breast, or I had, for you have stolen it from me. Dallas, won't you give me yours instead?"

Dallas felt a thrill of power that fluttered her waking womanhood. The man before her had grown pale and the hand extended towards her was trembling slightly. She knew suddenly what it was to be loved, and her lonely heart stabbed her with a bitter pang.

"I—I am very selfish," she said unsteadily, "I—I never

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thought about loving you, Sir Francis, but—but I do want someone to love me."

Francis Brunton put his arms about her.

"And you will let me be that someone?" he murmured; "you will let me try to make your life better worth living, you will let me try to win, perhaps, a little of your love?"

Dallas, mastered by his tenderness and her own solitariness, allowed her head to sink upon his breast. She was sobbing violently.

That night, when she was alone in her room, she opened the window and looked forth at the silent night and the peaceful river. There were no lights in the neighbouring house—an unusual thing, for Kenneth had pointed out to her once the window of his "den," and it, at all events, was seldom unilluminated after dusk.

The perfume of rose-leaves came to her nostrils. She turned and saw that the rose he had given her lay where she had placed it some hours earlier, on her toilet-table. She picked it up. A gem on her finger—a fine diamond in a man's ring—caught the light and glittered. It was Sir Francis Brunton's—he had put it on her finger till he could replace it with a more fitting sign of betrothal.

Slowly Dallas fingered the blossom in her hands—the petals broke loose from the stem, a scented heap in her hollowed palm. She scattered them into the darkness beyond her window and shut the casement.

Crossing the Second.

"Do you know, little woman, I'm afraid I neglect you shamefully. I promised you you should never be lonely after you were married—a pretty way I keep my promise."

Francis Brunton put down his coffee-cup and glanced at the figure on the other side of the dainty *tête-à-tête* table. The subdued talk and glitter and the rippling orchestral music of the dinner-room in the newest and smartest London hotel restaurant surrounded them, but a friendly pillar, incircled with palms, screened the small table and the two diners.

Dallas smiled—she had been watching her husband's thoughtful face. Francis Brunton was three years older than when, in a certain riverside garden, he had asked her a momentous question, but he looked three years younger.

When he laughed, by comparison with his former grave self, he seemed almost boyish. Dallas had become a woman—in her handsome dinner-gown and diamonds, a rarely beautiful and imperial woman.

"Was that what you were pondering?" she said. "How foolish! You know that I am very happy—very, very happy."

"Are you?" murmured her husband, and he leant to gaze into her bright face.

Dallas' eyes answered for her.

"Of course I am," she said. "I like to watch you climbing up—up—up, with people wondering at you and admiring you, and know all the time that only I have the key of your heart. I am a very insignificant person, I know, but it makes me feel proud. When they made you Home Secretary, I had to snub you every day for a week, to show you that I wasn't afraid of you—don't you remember?"

Francis Brunton clasped his wife's hand under cover of a loaded epergne; they were lost to the crowd of well-dressed diners about them. She patted his fingers caressingly, and looked at a jewelled watch set in the bracelet at her wrist.

"You mustn't stop flirting here with me," she said, "or something will go wrong at the House and the Opposition paper will write nasty little paragraphs about the absence of the Home Secretary. I am going to drop in at the Accringtons' and then on to the Damers' for supper. Another late sitting for you, I suppose—never mind, the session will soon be over and then——"

"Then for Nice once more," said Francis Brunton, rising. "Heigho, I wish I could turn the clock back and have our honeymoon over again."

"And have to re-live the last three years," observed Dallas saucily. "No, thank you, dear, we might miss the Home Office on the way."

Her husband frowned. "Just at the moment," he confessed, "I believe I shouldn't be sorry. I hate this recurring problem of 'to hang or not to hang?'"

Dallas sighed. "You mean that Glasgow murder," she said. "Yes, but, after all, dear, you are guided by what the judge and the Crown lawyers think."

The Home Secretary put her cloak about her shoulders.

"I know," he answered, "but the responsibility is mine. I am tempted to be merciful, but the judge is adverse and so are my other advisers. The fellow shot the policeman, it is true, but the wound was not in a necessarily vital part and only proved fatal by complications. And there was something heroic in the stand he made that his companions might escape. I should like to save him, but it is unquestionably a dangerous precedent, since the police must be protected in the exercise of their duties."

"I don't see," said Dallas, woman-like, "that it's any use being Home Secretary if you can't please yourself."

Francis Brunton smiled sadly. "One has only a sort of casting-vote," he replied. "Come along, little woman, don't let my worries afflict you."

He donned his crush-hat, and, her hand upon his arm, led her to her carriage. Ten minutes later he was alighting from a hansom in Palace Yard, and she was sweeping up the great staircase at Accrington House.

Lady Brunton had become socially one of the best-liked and one of the most unfeignedly respected of young matrons. Her frank good-nature, her shrewd common-sense, her quick personal pride, and, above all, the "grand passion" that existed between her and her popular husband, had opened for her many a door that stands closed to the merely rich and smart.

"See, there is another of my roses out." And he gave her the splendid scented flower.

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It was late when her carriage stopped at her own door in a quiet street off St. James'. As she descended from the luxurious brougham she looked up at the neighbouring clock tower and sighed—the light at its summit showed that the Commons were still sitting.

A footman opened to her, and she went on upstairs to her boudoir; most of her household were already asleep, for her rules were those of a considerate and intelligent mistress.

The door of the boudoir stood ajar and the apartment was lighted. Concluding that her maid had heard her arrival, and preceded her to the room, Dallas passed in.

The door closed behind her, swiftly, noiselessly, and she felt herself seized from behind. A gag was thrust into her mouth, a silk handkerchief bound over it, her wrists were fastened, and she was partially released. Her cloak had dropped from her shoulders, her fettered hands were still held by her assailants. They were two men—both vigorous, roughly-dressed, and masked—from upper lip to forehead.

She regarded them steadfastly—supposing them to be burglars. Then she noticed that nothing was disarranged in the room, no drawers or cases stood wide to suggest the rapid expert rifling of the modern cracksman. Her maid, too, a pleasant English girl, sat gagged and bound in a chair—pale and terrified.

One of her assailants—the taller—spoke to Dallas quietly.

"You are Lady Brunton," he said, "take it coolly—we hope not to have to do you any harm. But if, for our own purposes, we have to take that muffler off your mouth, remember that a cry or a call will mean your instant death." And he showed her a long, keen dagger.

Dallas shivered.

"Come," he added, loosing his own grasp upon her wrist and shoulder, and passing before her and his companion into the adjoining apartment. It was a small writing-room that Francis Brunton had had fitted up and comfortably furnished in order that, when working at night, as he had been often compelled to during the three years that had slipped away in arduous political labour, he might be near his wife. There was a wall-telephone in a corner, affording a means of communication between husband and wife during late sittings at the House.

The chief of the masked men approached the telephone and rang up. The number that he gave was a familiar one to Dallas—that of the members' telephone at the House of Commons.

"Will you ask Sir Francis Brunton to come to the telephone?" he said, when the connection had been made. "Lady Brunton wishes to speak to him."

There was a pause and the three waited.

"Yes?" said the man at the telephone suddenly; "is that Sir Francis Brunton?"

Another pause.

"Sir Francis Brunton," went on the masked stranger at the instrument, "I am speaking to you from the room adjoining your wife's boudoir. Her life depends upon your silence and self-control. Remain where you are and listen to me."

He stopped an instant—an instant only.

"Your wife is here," he said, "gagged and bound and in our power, but uninjured—as yet. You will give me your word of honour as an English gentleman that John Howland, now lying under sentence of death at Glasgow, for the murder of a policeman, will be reprieved. If you refuse, on your return here you will find your wife stabbed to the heart."

Dallas, overpowering her guardian, sprang forward. The realisation of her husband's agony had given her an irresistible strength. But it passed as quickly as it had come. The man at the telephone seized and held her.

"Let him hear your voice," he commanded, "and I swear to you, if you scream or cry, I will lay you dead at my feet."

He set the blade of his dagger to her bosom and his comrade took off the bandage and removed the gag. The other motioned to the telephone. Dallas put her lips to the mouthpiece; the other still had the receiver to his ear.

"Darling," she said, "don't think of me; do what—what is right."

She was dragged back and regagged, an oath echoing in her ear.

"Something's wrong," exclaimed the taller of her captors, snatching up the momentarily-relinquished ear-piece, "he screamed out."

The speaker listened intently and then started back. "Someone says he's fainted," his ally was told; "the chance has missed fire. We must carry her off and work it that way."

Dallas wrenched herself free and turned to bay. But her hands were bound behind her and she could not get at the gag in her mouth. She sprang to the bell, but the man with the knife intercepted her. His companion, who had remained mute throughout the whole singular episode, stepped between.

"No more of this," he said; "I'm sick of it, do you hear?"

His voice was strangely familiar—Dallas racked her brains to identify the stern, tremulous tones. But there was no time—the two men had grappled angrily. The younger man staggered back out of the fierce, silent struggle; he had wrenched the dagger from the elder, but his mask had been disarranged and it fell to the ground. Dallas gasped—the face revealed was that of her one-time friend and confidant, Kenneth Haviland!

He came towards her, his face white and his eyes drooping.

"Forgive me," he faltered, "I didn't recognise you at first; I did not know it was Brunton they—they wanted you to—to marry. I—I—it was only bluff—a—a mad idea, but we wouldn't have hurt you."

Dallas shrank away as he advanced.

He stopped, wincing.

"You can't understand," he said, "the man they are going to hang is my father. I hate him—he brought me up to be a thief and a forger, but I couldn't stand by and let them hang him. He—he held the police at bay that I might escape."

His companion flung himself upon the speaker. Far off there was the sound of wheels and hoofs—a wild, mad gallop such as seldom or never breaks the night quiet of the London streets.

"Away, you fool," Kenneth Haviland was told; "we're tracked—that's coming here."

He threw open a second door to the room and darted out. Kenneth Haviland stayed to loosen the cord about Dallas' wrists and to snatch the gag from her mouth.

"Forgive me," he said, and was gone.

A moment or two later, Francis Brunton, panting and dishevelled, sprang into his wife's boudoir, to find Dallas, half distracted with pity and anxiety, calling his name into the transmitter of the telephone. He caught her to him, and, strained to his breast, she contrived, between the suffocating sobs and shuddering sighs of a nervous collapse, to tell him what had happened.

"His son," he murmured slowly, "poor lad, poor lad!—my darling, what is the matter?"

A sudden sharp cry—half scream, half exclamation—had broken from his wife's lips. Francis Brunton's head—but a few hours before a mass of crisp, dark curls—was snow-white.

* * * * *

The Home Office reprieved John Howland, *alias* Haviland, and a window giving on a flat roof from an upper landing of the house in St. James' was closed with iron bars. Through it Kenneth and his companion had entered that night on their mad errand.

What he had told her was too true. The Haviland gang had been responsible for a brilliant series of international forgeries extending over years. Of those forgeries Kenneth had been the actual executor.

Trained from youth to the science and art of forgery, and kept in seclusion that he might practise it, his soft, woman-like hands had achieved some of the most marvellous imitations that ever harassed European and American commerce.

He and his more resolute companion—the practical chief and organiser of the gang—succeeded in effecting their escape beyond the reach of extradition laws. Nor was Dallas sorry. She will always pity him—except, perhaps, when she looks at her husband's handsome white head.

R. Norman Silver.

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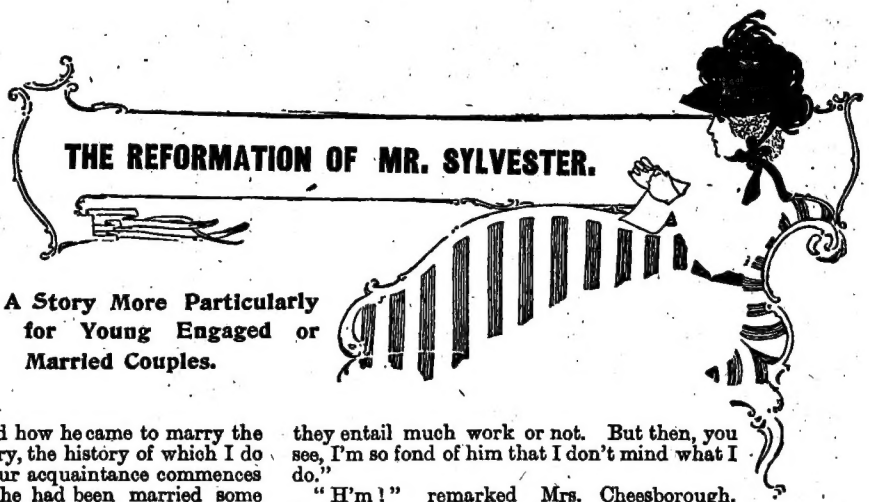

THE REFORMATION OF MR. SYLVESTER.

A Story More Particularly for Young Engaged or Married Couples.

By the way, this is not exactly a story, or a romance, or anything of that sort, but it is simply a history in which a large moral is to be found.

Hugh Sylvester was handsome; that fact was undeniable. And before he had married his pretty wife he had been quite indispensable at every *fête, soirée*, garden party, and dance. In fact, they made of Hugh Sylvester quite a little tin god, and as time went on he grew to regard himself in such a light. Now this was a great pity, for he was one of the best of fellows, if only his friends would not try to spoil him.

How he escaped the clutches of various matchmaking mothers and how he came to marry the girl he loved, is quite another story, the history of which I do not propose to set down here. Our acquaintance commences with Mr. Hugh Sylvester after he had been married some months.

The Sylvesters occupied a flat in the north of London. It contained one dining-room, one living room, one odd room, a scullery, and two bedrooms. In fact, it was one of the latest triumphs of the builder's desire to economically benefit young married couples. The locality, too, was a very nice one—on the verge of the countryside and yet within easy reach of town.

Mr. Sylvester's salary, whilst not large, was quite sufficient for comfort and the swelling of a bank account. In addition to all these advantages, Hugh and Madge Sylvester were very much in love with one another. Then, one naturally says, what more do they want?

There was, however, a flaw in the setting which did not appear until just about the time when we make the acquaintance of the Sylvesters.

The origin of the said flaw lay, of course, in that failing of Hugh Sylvester which I have just chronicled. He had set himself up on a pinnacle, or rather it was the doing of other people, and whilst deeply in love with his wife, he had grown to regard her as—well, just as someone belonging to him who would do all he required and worship him into the bargain.

I do not think he was actually very conceited, but the homage and attention he had received before he was married had given him a remarkably good opinion of himself.

Thus it became apparent to Mrs. Sylvester that Mr. Sylvester was not quite all he might be in the matter of his treatment towards her. He had everything he required, and would have been very surprised if his wife did not see that he was as comfortable as he could be, and perhaps at her expense. And there lies the secret of the flaw. Madge Sylvester was too fond of her husband to deny him anything and in consequence he developed a large bump of selfishness.

"My dear Madge," remarked Mrs. Cheesborough, as she sat at tea in the Sylvester's flat, "you pamper up that husband of yours too much. You feed him on the fat of the land until he regards his home as a restaurant and orders anything he fancies, no matter how much trouble it causes; you conform to every opinion of his, you wait on him hand and foot and do his every bidding.

"And what is the result, what do you get for it all? Why, simply that his lordship is graciously pleased to allow you to work for him, until extravagances become duties and ordinary duties are thankless tasks. Now, my dear, you can get cross if you like, but I've wanted to say it for some time and now I've said it."

Madge Sylvester remained mute, and sat with a thoughtful expression puckering up her pretty face. Presently she said:

"I'm afraid you're right. I have noticed that Hugh wants such a lot of things done and never troubles to inquire whether they entail much work or not. But then, you see, I'm so fond of him that I don't mind what I do."

"H'm!" remarked Mrs. Cheesborough. "And you're going just the way to lose his love by pampering him so."

Her only reply was a very astonished look from Madge.

"Now, listen to me, my dear," went on Mrs. Cheesborough, and for the next half hour she gave a considerable amount of advice of a wholesome nature to Madge Sylvester. And when she left at about six o'clock, these mysterious remarks might have been heard:—

"Now you'll do all I have suggested, won't you, Madge?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then His Imperial Majesty will become Prince Charming again. Good-bye, Madge."

"Good-bye, Maud."

And that was the Reformation Council.

On the following evening at about half-past six Mr. Sylvester arrived home and let himself in with the latchkey. He walked into the dining-room, but, to his surprise, found it empty. I say he was surprised, for Mrs. Sylvester made a rule of rushing to relieve him of his coat, hat, and stick, and then put them in their various resting places.

Mr. Sylvester stood waiting for some minutes, and then with an injured air exerted himself sufficiently to remove his outdoor garb. Then he gazed into a mirror, adjusted his tie, smoothed his hair, curled his moustache, and, with a self-satisfied smile, went to look for his wife. He found her in an easy chair in the bedroom reading a novel. He stood in the open door and waited for her to rush to him, but she neither rushed nor looked, simply turned over another page. In a much injured tone, he said:

"Madge!" And again waited for her to fly to him.

Then she did look, but did not fly.

"Hullo, Hugh!" she said. "Back again?"

He was too astonished to respond.

"Well, aren't you going to kiss me?" she went on.

Mechanically he went across and kissed her. There was something wrong here, he thought, whilst he thoughtfully tugged at his moustache.

"I suppose you want some dinner now?" was the next remark that fell on his astonished ears.

"Er—yes—of course," he stammered. Whereupon Mrs. Sylvester got up and sailed out of the room, gaily humming a lively tune.

Hugh Sylvester stood and gazed in wonderment at his wife's disappearing figure. Left to himself he collapsed into a chair, and thought until he was almost green in the face and his moustache loose with tugging.

"Dinner is ready, Hugh!"

"Dinner can wait!" Hugh savagely muttered to himself, and he still sat thinking. Presently his wife called him again.

"Your dinner is getting cold, Hugh."

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Then he jumped up and hurried to the dining-room, where he found his wife half way through her dinner.

"Well, you might have waited for me," he grumbled.

"My dear boy," replied Madge, "I told you ten minutes ago that your dinner was ready."

"But when I didn't come you could easily have waited. What is for dinner?"

"Veal, dear."

"Veal!" he cried.

"Yes, Hugh. A very nice cut indeed."

"But, Madge," he cried, in an excessively injured tone, "you know I don't care much for veal."

"But I like it better than any other joint, Hugh. And this is the first time we have had it since we have been married."

Mr. Sylvester ate his dinner in ungracious silence.

When the meal was over and all cleared away, Mr. Sylvester picked up a book and began to read. He filled his pipe and lit it, and was beginning to feel very comfortable when suddenly he heard his wife's voice.

"Hugh!"

"Hullo!" was that gentleman's not very gracious response.

"I want some coal brought in, will you come and do it for me, please?"

Had she asked him to get the moon I doubt if he would have been more astonished. Never since they had been married had he done anything of that sort. Surely that wasn't for him to do. But, however, he slowly and reluctantly closed his book, and with a much aggrieved air he managed to raise sufficient energy to fill the scuttle and carry it to the dining-room, but he did it with very bad grace. Then again he arrayed himself before the fire, with the self-conscious air of one who has done noble deeds.

"Hugh!"

It was his wife's voice again. Was he never to have any peace?

"Well?" he called.

"You might come here and reach this jar down for me."

"Great Scot!" he muttered, "is a man never to get any rest?" Then he departed to the kitchen.

"What is it you want?" he demanded.

"You see that jar of pickles on the top shelf, well, I want it got down."

"Jupiter! Well, couldn't you get at it without troubling me?"

"Oh, Hugh, it's not often I ask you to do anything. You see, you have to have the steps, and they are down in the basement; then if you'll get those we can get at the jar all right."

Slowly he departed down the stairs, and in about ten minutes' time came back again, puffing and grunting, with the pair of steps on his back.

"Now, then," he said, grumblingly, "I'll get the jar down."

"It's all right, Hugh. I got it down myself as you were such a long time gone, by pulling the table over to the wall and putting the chair on it. Will you carry the steps back again now, please?"

"Mr. Sylvester's thoughts would have rivalled Turner's painting of Venice for picturesque and lurid colouring. But with mighty self-control he restrained himself and started out of the kitchen on his journey back. No sooner had he gone than Mrs. Sylvester shook with silent laughter, whilst she softly murmured:

"Poor dear old boy. He doesn't take to it very well."

When Mr. Sylvester returned to the dining-room again his wife was very comfortably reclining in the armchair which he had vacated. Again he thought considerably.

Presently he had to go out into the scullery to fetch his slippers, a thing that his wife had always hitherto done. And when he retired to rest that night he was in a decidedly dissatisfied frame of mind.

Much the same sort of thing happened the next evening and the evening after that, though, Mrs. Sylvester has since said, it was as much as she could do to refrain from departing from the counsel of the Council and making Hugh sit down whilst she waited and fussed over him; but, luckily, she persevered. On the Thursday night, though, came the crowning stroke of all.

When Mr. Sylvester reached home he found a note stating that his wife had gone shopping with Mrs. Cheesborough, and would not be back until about eight o'clock.

The note went on to say that there was some steak in the larder, and the potatoes and greens were all ready for boiling on the gas stove. Mr. Sylvester was absolutely dumfounded, such a thing had never happened before. But still, there was only one thing to do, so he got to work.

"How to be happy though married," he groaned, as he hopped round the kitchen on one foot—the other having unfortunately got in the way of the frying pan which he had upset; he had also burnt his fingers in his attempt to save it.

But he eventually got the steak in the frying pan, and lit the gas under it. Then it occurred to him that he had seen his wife put grease into the frying pan when she was cooking. Whereupon he skirmished for grease.

After some trouble, he found a cup standing on a shelf in the larder which he pounced upon.

"Ha! The very thing!" he cried. "I'm sure lard is greasy."

Then he placed a large portion in with the steak, and turned the gas on full under the meat and vegetables.

The meat smelt very peculiar as it was cooking, and while Mr. Sylvester rushed to the door to answer a tradesman, the steak became a glorious black colour. However, he placed it on a hot plate in the oven to keep warm whilst the vegetables cooked.

Presently he came to the conclusion that they had cooked long enough, and removed both saucepans into the scullery. Here he attempted to pour the water off, with the result that half went up his sleeve, and, with an agonising yell, he dropped the whole affair.

Potatoes flew everywhere; Mr. Sylvester spoke fluently. However, he collected as many as he possibly could, and placed them with the steak and cabbage.

"Reckon the drains must be out of order," he muttered, as he carried his dinner into the dining-room.

He arrayed himself at the table and set to work on the food before him with much gusto. Suddenly he gave vent to an exclamation of disgust, then he groaned, and wanted to die.

Slowly he staggered to an armchair and fell into it, all the time moaning in an agonising manner.

In the midst his wife entered, and gazed at him in terrified surprise. Then she rushed across to him.

"Hugh!" she cried. "Whatever is the matter?"

Feebly he pointed to the dinner and groaned out:

"I've been poisoned, Madge. Oh, let me die in peace."

"What *do* you mean, Hugh?" she asked in concerned tones. Then she commenced to sniff, and cried:

"Whatever have you been doing with beeswax, Hugh?"

"Beeswax?" he moaned. "When?"

Then she suddenly glanced at his plate and saw that the gravy, now nearly cold, was fast setting in a white mass. Then she bent and smelt it.

"Why," she cried, "you've got beeswax here."

"That's lard!" he feebly remonstrated. "I got it out of the cupboard."

"What, from a cup?" questioned his wife

"Yes."

"Why, that *was* the beeswax," she cried.

"Oh!"

With a shriek of dismay he rushed from the room, and about half an hour afterwards returned, very pale and white but quite well again. His appearance so upset Madge that the Council's counsel was quite forgotten, but then, of course, he was an invalid that night.

However, I happened to call round there not long ago, and surprised Sylvester in the act of bringing up more coal, and he was whistling over it, too. And no longer is Madge simply Mr. Sylvester's wife, nor does Mr. Sylvester still imagine himself a little tin god, but they are one of the happiest couples I know.

E. Newton Bungey.

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A PLUCKY ESCAPE.

Proving that Honesty is the Best Policy.

"A TELEGRAM for you, miss!"

I took the yellow envelope from the porter of Inkermann Mansions somewhat reluctantly.

A telegram to a woman in the nursing profession generally means a fresh case, and I didn't want another case just then.

The fact is I was quite tired out and was returning to my modest flat in Inkermann Mansions with the full intention of taking a few weeks' absolute rest.

The telegram however was destined to upset all my plans. It ran as follows:

"*To Nurse Compton, Inkermann Mansions. Earl's Court.*

"*Can you undertake slight mental case at once. Wire decision direct to L. Duvernois, Esq., White House, Hadlow-on-the-Hill.* "SPENCER LEIGH."

The signature decided the matter. I had been on Sir Spencer Leigh's list of nurses for some months, but it was the first time the great nerve specialist had sent me a case.

I decided to accept it at once, and, making my way to the nearest post-office, wired my reply as directed.

An hour later, just as I had finished packing my modest trunk, the porter appeared with a second telegram.

"*Motor will meet train arriving Hadlow Junction* 8.5.

"L. DUVERNOIS."

I turned to the railway guide, and ascertained that the train in question left Victoria at 6.30. Then I glanced at my watch. It was six o'clock. That gave me just time to drive to the station, and left no margin for calling on Sir Spencer Leigh. Of course it was better to hear the details of a case direct, but no doubt he had provided ample written directions pending a personal interview.

It was not an inviting evening even for a short journey. The murky fog of London developed into a clinging damp mist as we got out into the open country, and when at length I stepped on to the platform at Hadlow Junction I shivered as I thought of the cold drive in a motor-car.

I had just given up my ticket, when a short, thick-set man, with a brown beard, stepped to my side.

"Nurse Compton, I presume?" he said, raising his motor cap, then as I bowed he added in a smooth, refined voice—"My name is Duvernois. I hope you don't mind rather a long drive. It is cold, but there are plenty of wraps, I think."

There were. In fact, when enveloped in the long fur coat, which Mr. Duvernois insisted on wrapping carefully round me, and with a huge rug over my knees, I felt thoroughly inclined to enjoy my first drive in a motor.

My companion seemed astonished that it should be a new experience for me. "But I forgot," he added courteously, "the automobile is not yet as popular in England as it is with us in France."

"Then you are not English?" said I bluntly.

"No, but I have lived here a good deal, and have at least, I think, mastered your terribly difficult language."

"You speak English wonderfully well," said I, "and my patient——"

"Can only just make herself understood. But no doubt you speak French, Mademoiselle?" he added quickly.

"I used to, and I understand——"

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, but I must beg of you not to reveal to my mother that you understand French, or she will insist on talking, and the doctors have decided that the quieter she is kept the better."

"Please tell me all about your mother's case," said I eagerly. "I had no time to go to Harley Street before I left town, so until I see Sir Spencer Leigh——"

"That will be some time hence," said Mr. Duvernois, "because I understand he is starting for the Riviera to-night. He has, however, left full directions about my mother's treatment, and I can, of course, give you the outlines of her case myself.

"Briefly then, her present mental disturbance is due to shock. Three months ago, when on her way to London, she met with a railway accident. When she recovered consciousness it was discovered that the brain had sustained partial injury. She had completely lost her memory on some points, while on others she was as clearly intelligent as ever. For instance, she recognised her maid, Françoise, but not me, her son. Curious, was it not, Mademoiselle?"

"Very curious, and very sad for you, I should think," said I, glancing at my companion's pale, melancholy face.

"Ah, yes, sad indeed, for my poor mother was devoted to her son. But figure to yourself, Mademoiselle, that not only does she not recognise me, but at times she imagines that I am her son's valet and the husband of her maid, Françoise. It is lamentable, is it not? But I am not discouraged. The doctors all assure me that her recovery is a mere question of time, patience, and a quiet, secluded life.

"That is how I came to take a house in this out-of-the-way place. I hope Mademoiselle does not mind the solitude of the country?" he added courteously.

"Not in the least—in fact, just now I am very glad of it," said I.

"That is lucky, for we are three, nearly four miles from Hadlow Village, and ten from the railway station. Ah! there is the church," he added, as we turned into a straggling village street, where the lights from the cottage windows gleamed cheerily in the winter dusk.

We stopped for a moment at the post-office which was at the same time the village shop. Mr. Duvernois exchanged a cheery good evening with the buxom post-mistress as she handed him a bundle of letters and proceeded to inquire after his mother's health.

"She's going on very nicely indeed, thank you, Mrs. Reid," he said courteously, "and the doctors are hoping that your splendid moorland air will soon put her right."

"That's good news, sir," said the woman, and stood smiling in the doorway of the shop as the motor sped up the village street.

Perhaps it was the change from the cheery cottage lights, perhaps that I was beginning to get tired, but it seemed

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to me as though the narrow, ribbon-like road, winding upwards over the moor, would never come to an end. Then suddenly it curved round sharply to the right, and nestling in a cup-like hollow of the hill, stood a substantial white house.

It looked a very cheerful place from the outside, with its twinkling lights, and when I crossed the threshold and was ushered by a rosy-cheeked country girl into a cosy dining-room, where the preparations for a dainty meal were set out, and a huge fire roared up the wide chimney, I began to think I had found very comfortable quarters indeed.

It was not until I had made an excellent meal and enjoyed a cup of coffee, such as one seldom tastes out of France, that I was joined by Mr. Duvernois, who proposed, if I were sufficiently rested, to introduce me to my patient.

I rose at once and followed my host across the square hall to a well-furnished drawing-room, at the door of which he paused and knocked.

"May I come in, *ma mère?*" he said in French, and as there was no response he opened the door, and we passed into the room.

Coming out of the brilliantly-lighted hall, the room seemed to be in semi-darkness, being lighted solely by a small reading-lamp placed on a table beside a high-backed chair.

In this chair, her eyes resting on the book in her hand, and the lamplight falling on her piled-up masses of white hair, sat the handsomest elderly lady I have ever seen.

She took no notice of our presence, till Mr. Duvernois placed his hand on her high-backed chair and said smoothly:

"*Ma mère*, I have brought you a charming young lady as a companion." Then, turning to me, "Mademoiselle," he said, "allow me to introduce you to my mother, Madame Duvernois."

The old lady's book fell to the floor with a crash, as she rose to her feet.

"How dare you address me by that common name? How dare you introduce me as your mother?" she said in low tones of contempt.

Then she pointed to the door. "I wish to be alone. Go! And enjoy the society of your wife and fellow plotter!"

Mr. Duvernois bowed, and with a patient smile on his melancholy face left the room.

Then the old lady turned to me, and as I met the glance of her handsome dark eyes a sudden memory that had not been stirred for years darted across my brain.

I was an awkward schoolgirl, spending a summer afternoon with a little French school-friend, whose aunt was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

She had coal-black hair that rippled above arched brows, and eyes that were the exact counterpart of those turned so searchingly upon me.

"Surely you are Madame de Latour?" I was beginning, when I felt a hand laid across my lips.

"Hush!" she said, "you seem to know me, child, but you must not explain at present." Then she added in harsh, loud tones, "As Mr. Duvernois has been kind enough to provide me with a nurse, I shall be only too glad to avail myself of your services. I am tired of Françoise—as she is well aware," she added, turning to the sallow-faced Frenchwoman who had glided noiselessly into the room without my noticing her approach.

"Unfortunately Nurse Compton does not understand French," said Françoise, flashing a warning glance at me. "So that if Madame wishes to converse, it must be in English."

"How very tiresome," said the old lady, with a yawn. "I cannot hold a rational conversation in that barbarous language.

"Bed, Françoise?" she broke off. "Very well; but since Nurse Compton is here she can relieve you at anyrate for to-night."

"Pardon, madame, but Monsieur's orders are——"

"About as futile as his pretensions to be anything more or less than one of the biggest scoundrels unhung!" said the old lady coolly.

Françoise smiled a contemptuous smile as she turned to me.

"She's pretty bad to-night, nurse, don't be astonished if she insists on telling you her real name is Latour, and that Monsieur Duvernois is not her son but a valet, and my husband."

"I think I understand," said I.

It was a whole week before I found myself alone with Madame de Latour without being conscious of the espionage either of Monsieur Duvernois or Françoise.

The week had, however, not been wasted, for I had succeeded in convincing both Françoise and her husband of my complete gullibility as regards my patient.

I openly bewailed the fact that the poor lady should have such an unpleasant delusion with regard to her son. I pitied Monsieur. I sympathised with Françoise at being forced to live in such an out-of-the-way little place in this quiet Angleterre.

Of course, no doubt, it was the best thing for Madame's health—in fact, Monsieur must be the most devoted of sons to carry out the doctor's directions so minutely, but there was just one thing in which I thought Monsieur was mistaken. His mother did not have sufficient fresh air, I argued, and most doctors were agreed that in mental cases driving was most beneficial. True, Sir Spencer Leigh had not mentioned it, but if I were to write and ask whether a daily drive in the motor——"

"There is no necessity to do that, nurse," interrupted Mr. Duvernois hastily.

"We can try the experiment, and if my poor dear mother likes it, well and good. Unfortunately I shall not be able to drive her myself every day, but my chauffeur understands his business, so it will be all right. Only don't let mother chatter too much, I can't bear to think of the servants being aware of the extent of her infirmity, and if she insists on talking French——"

"You forget, I don't understand French, Monsieur!" said I, laughing.

"Oh, I forgot, nurse; but I am quite sure you understand your business, and if, with your assistance, we can only get my poor mother well enough to enjoy life a little and transact some simple family business, which is at present at a standstill for want of her signature, I shall take care that our gratitude to you takes a very substantial form indeed."

"Thank you," said I, in a tone that left no doubt I had grasped the inner meaning of his words. Mr. Duvernois had decided to try the effect of a bribe, and was obviously satisfied with the result.

So was I, for I had gained my point, and was to drive with Madame de Latour alone, for, curiously enough, Françoise, who had intended to accompany us, had a violent fit of sickness just as the motor drove up to the door—and this in spite of the fact that I had given her a specific of my own some little time before.

When we got into the high road I gave the chauffeur some directions in French.

"Sorry, mum, but I don't understand no foreign lingo," said the man with a good-tempered grin.

"I only asked you where you were going to drive us," said I.

"Wherever you wish, mum. Master didn't give no orders; he said Miss Françoise would know where it was best for

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Madame to go. I've to meet master at the London train at 7.15. There's plenty of time between this and then for a good long drive, mum. It's rather pretty towards Lewes, across the downs and along the Newhaven road."

"Newhaven!" I exclaimed, and caught my breath with excitement before I added quietly:

"How long would it take you to drive us to Newhaven, Armour?"

"Well, it might be done in about two hours and a half, mum, but then we'd have to get back, you see, and that might be too far for the mistress."

"It sounds rather fatiguing," said Madame, with a little yawn, "suppose we go as far as this place—what is it you call it? Louis—Yes? And, *cocher*."

"Yes, mum."

"Drive, *vite, vite*. I want to feel what it is like to go quickly. You understand?"

"Yes, mum," said Armour, and applied himself to the brake, for we were already going at an alarming pace down hill.

Madame de Latour drew me down beside her, and thrust a tiny local railway guide into my hand.

"It's a month old," she said in rapid French; "but let's hope the boat trains haven't altered.

"See you, my child, I have been studying that little book for a whole month, and if we can only get to Newhaven in time to catch the boat——"

"But Armour would perhaps suspect."

"Leave that to me," said the old lady, her handsome eyes flashing with determination.

"But tell me," I said eagerly, "how came this man Duvernois and his accomplice to shut you up in the White House and keep you a prisoner all these weeks? Of course their object must have been money, but how did they hope to obtain it?"

"Chiefly by means of a chapter of accidents, my dear nurse, all of which seemed to play into their hands.

"To begin with, my son Raoul and I made up our minds that we would go for a tour round the world. The idea was Raoul's, of course, and since he desired me to go with him, I was ready.

"We had no one to consult as to our movements, having no near relations except my little niece, your schoolfriend, who is now married and with her husband at Pondicherry.

"We intended to begin our travels by coming to London, and it was when we were half way between Dover and London that the accident happened. It was horrible, quite horrible! my child, and it was weeks before I could get the shrieks and groans of the wounded people out of my head. Raoul was killed," continued the old lady, in a quiet voice.

"I remember kissing his dead face, and then something seemed to snap in my brain, and when I came to my senses, weeks later, it was to find myself in this out-of-the-way place, well-cared for, as I thought, by Françoise and her husband. It was not for some time that the full extent of their rascality dawned upon me.

"I made several efforts to escape or at least communicate with the outside world, but without success. My letters were never sent, my telegrams were intercepted, I was watched like a prisoner in the Bastille, I saw no one except the servants, who had previously been informed of my mental derangement."

"But surely Sir Spencer Leigh——" I interrupted.

"My dear child, I never saw him, he knew nothing about my case."

"But his telegram to me?"

"A myth, dear child, to induce you to come."

"But why?"

"Françoise was beginning to get ill, she couldn't stand the anxiety of watching me night and day, whereas a nurse, responsible to a great physician—with her reputation at stake——"

"Go and enjoy the society of your wife and fellow-plotter."

"The wretches! But what was their object in all this?"

"Just to get my signature to a transfer of shares valued at something like £10,000, which Grosjean intended, I fancy, to turn at once into cash, before disappearing with his wife."

"But how did they get the money for current expenses?"

"We had taken out letters of credit for several hundred pounds so as not to be hampered on our travels. Raoul's signature was easy to copy."

"But if he was dead," I interrupted gently.

"Yes, Raoul was killed, but they buried Antoine Grosjean, his valet, in the little Surrey churchyard, Françoise even had the audacity to show me a photograph of the grave," said the old lady, in a quiet, even voice.

There was silence for a few moments, as we slid rapidly down the slope of the downs and went whirling along a smooth, straight road.

"That is Lewes, over yonder, mum," said Armour, as we came in sight of a sleepy looking country town.

"Tell him to stop at the nearest inn and order some tea for us and some refreshment for himself," said Madame de Latour with a slight yawn.

"But do you think we have time?" I whispered anxiously.

"Oh, yes, plenty of time," said the old lady carelessly, as Armour pulled up at the door of an old-fashioned country inn.

"This will be all right for your beer, coachman, but I don't think it looks clean enough for tea. Just drive us to that nice little baker's shop further down the street, then you can leave us for half-an-hour while we enjoy our tea in peace," she said quietly.

Armour grinned delighted acquiesence, and having brought the motor to a standstill in front of the baker's shop, hurried back to the White Hart. No sooner had he disappeared within its hospitable precincts than Madame de Latour quietly took her seat by the driving wheel.

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"What are you going to do?" I exclaimed, aghast with astonishment.

"Do?" echoed the old lady, her great eyes flashing. "Why, what I've done scores of times before with Raoul. What I've done in imagination ever since I caught sight of this thrice-blessed motor. I'm going to drive at full speed into Newhaven and catch the boat for France!"

I shall never forget that drive, if I live to be a hundred! It seemed to me that the county of Sussex slid by like a panorama, as we tore along the roads, stopping every now and then to study the sign-posts or make an inquiry from a villager as to the nearest route.

But when at last we jerked over the cobble-stones down to the quay at Newhaven, and saw that preparations were being made for starting the boat, for the first time that day I saw the glitter of tears in the handsome dark eyes of my companion.

She hailed one of the porters and asked if she had time to send a wire before the boat started.

"Yes, mum, she starts in seven minutes. There's plenty of time to send a wire, post-office is just at the end of the quay."

Madame de Latour intrusted me with the telegrams which she had already written out.

One was to her lawyer in Paris, and the second to the superintendent of the French police.

Then we went on board, and a couple of minutes later were steaming out into the channel.

Madame de Latour gripped my arm as we stood watching the white cliffs of England grow fainter and fainter in the distance.

"So that little comedy is ended," she said, drawing a deep breath.

"Comedy?" I echoed incredulously.

"Yes, my child, what else? To be kept a prisoner for three months by a maid and a valet savours more of comedy than tragedy, I take it. Of course it depends a little on the point of view."

"I should think so, indeed," I interrupted vehemently, "I only hope those two wretches will have no chance of seeing anything but the tragic side of this business!"

Thanks to the intelligence and energy of the French police, my wishes in this respect were fulfilled even sooner than I expected.

The precious pair received the heaviest possible sentence for their crime which it was in the power of the judge to pronounce.

In spite of the fatigue of the trial Madame de Latour's splendid pluck never deserted her, nor, I may add, did her sense of humour.

"My child," she said a month later, as we drove to the station *en route* for the Riviera, "what do you suppose is the moral of all this unpleasant business?"

"Why, that honesty is the best policy, I suppose!" said I, smiling.

"Yes, of course, but there is an up-to-date one as well, and it is that in these days every woman should know how to drive a motor."

"It certainly proved a useful accomplishment in your case, Madame," I smilingly admitted. **Morris Coleborn.**

Maude: "You wouldn't know my *fiancé* now if you met him." Nell: "Why, has he changed so much as that?" Maude: "That isn't it exactly. I've changed him."

Mother: "Who has eaten the cake in the pantry?" Undaunted Infant: "I did." "And what did you do that for?" "I heard you tell Jane always to keep the cupboard shut. Yesterday she forgot, so I thought I would punish her by eating all the cakes."

"Come, old man," said the kind friend, "cheer up; there are others." "I don't mind her breaking the engagement so very much," said the despondent young man, "but to think that I have got to go on paying the instalments on the ring for a year to come yet! That's what's annoying me."

Your Editor Chats.

I hope to be able to announce the result of the Buried Stations Competition at an early date. Readers may rest assured that everything possible will be done to insure its publication at the earliest possible moment.

The order of popularity of the stories in *Short Stories* for July 11th was as follows: "Won Without Wooing," "The Wrong Miss Smith," "The Course of True Love," "The End of a Feud," "Toby's Rival," "Which Shall It Be?" "Violet Caryll's Quest," "Only a Model," "A Story in Letters." A gold-plated pencil-case has been awarded to Mr. A. Cartwright, 53, Newington Street, Belgrave, Leicester, whose list gave the order most correctly.

I take this opportunity of thanking "M. R.," of Iona, for her very kind gift of some flowers from that island, together with a picture post-card showing some of its beauties. I can assure her that they were much appreciated, and I am glad to know that *Short Stories* is just as popular in that far-away island as it is everywhere else.

Owing to the advent of Bank Holiday next week's *Short Stories* will be published on Friday, July 31st, instead of on Tuesday, August 4th, so you will be able to have it to take away to read during the holiday. The price will be the same as usual.

In this issue two new features will start. One of them is a splendid serial story by Henry T. Johnson, entitled "The Snare of Gold." The plot is a novel one, and the long instalment which will appear next week will give you a good idea as to what developments will take place.

The other feature is a series of stories called "The 'Bridge' of Ruin." These are the confessions of a girl gambler. The writer of the stories was left a small competence by an aunt, and shortly after the death of this relation was invited to stay with a school-friend in her country house. There she was initiated into the mysteries of Bridge, at which game she lost more than she could ever hope to pay. The instalment published next week tells you how she was led to continue to play, not understanding what she was doing, and other difficulties into which she got will be related in succeeding instalments.

Once again I make my appeal for the Fresh Air Fund. Contributions have been coming in most satisfactorily up to the present, but in the rush of getting away for their own holidays, people are apt to forget that there are little children in the big cities who are absolutely dependent on the help of friends for the one day's country holiday which they get in the whole year.

Before *you* go away to enjoy *yourself*, don't forget to send something along to ease these little lives. Ninepence pays for a whole day's outing for one child, allowing for plenty to eat and drink. That isn't a great sum, is it? If you can't afford to send ninepence, send what you can afford. Any amount, either more or less, or the exact sum, will be gladly received and acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. Address the envelope containing your contribution to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. The sooner you send it the better, as the summer is advancing, and of course the outings can only take place in the summer and early autumn.

Your Editor.

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A Binding Contract.

The Story of a Curious Betrothal.

THERE was a very satisfied look on the face of Johnnie Owen as he slowly made his way down a certain street in a central part of London. It was dark, and the street was one of those which, at night, are visited only by waifs and policemen; the former go there in order to find shelter for the night in the big doorways, while the guardians of the peace walk through it in twos and in the middle of the road.

Johnnie Owen was about ten years old, and his story was a common one. He was not at all sure that Mrs. Owen was his mother, but, however that might be, she had beaten him so unmercifully of late that he had made up his mind to leave the wretched place which he had called "home" and endeavour to get along by himself.

He was tall for his age, with an expression of countenance that indicated ability to shift for himself; he had earned some sort of existence in various ways for the past month, and had selected Parker Street as a sleeping-place for want of money to find a bed.

"Ninepence in one day!" Johnnie exclaimed, in a tone of mingled joy and amazement. He could scarcely credit his good luck, despite the comfortable sensation which made itself felt in the region where his waistcoat ought to have been. "Thruppence on fish, bread and pudden, and sixpence left! That'll start me in somethin' for to-morrer, and then p'raps I can go on decent! I might ha' had a bed to-night, but that would spoil the look o' that piece of silver. No! I must sleep in the doorway a bit longer!"

By this time he had reached the particular warehouse the porch of which formed his sleeping apartment. There was a nook in it that kept him out of the wind, as well as out of sight of the policemen who walked in the middle of the road and seldom ventured on the pavement to flash their bull's-eyes into the nooks and corners.

"I feel a bit tired to-night!" yawned Johnnie, walking up the three steps and feeling his way to the nook. "I can do—— Hallo! Bobby!"

He had touched someone or something, and he had at once concluded that it was his natural enemy, the man in blue. He was out in the road getting up speed for flight before he realised that he had heard a timid cry when he had placed his hand on that something under the porch.

"Sounded like a gal's voice!" muttered Johnnie reflectively, pulling himself up short. It occurred to him that the intruder was some waif, like himself, who was more afraid of his approach than Johnnie was of the policeman. "I'll see!" he added.

Cautiously he went back to the steps.

"Who's that?" he demanded sharply.

He remained on the alert, ready to "bolt" if a policeman shot out from the secluded corner in answer to his question; but the sound of the voice reassured him completely.

"Oh, please don't hurt me! I've runned away!"

Johnnie penetrated the depths of the porch, took out a box containing a dozen wax vestas, dropped by some reveller, and ignited one. Holding it so that the light fell upon the object before him, he saw a girl somewhat younger than himself.

She was very poorly clad, but her clothes were not quite so ragged as his; her face was rather pretty notwithstanding the marks of tears and the signs of hunger. The child—she was little more — was crouching in a corner and gazing at him with appealing eyes.

"You won't send me back? You won't hurt me?" she queried piteously. "I'm dreffful hungry, but I'd sooner be hungry than go back!"

A fellow-feeling sprang up within the heart of Johnnie Owen.

"You needn't fret yourself about *that*!" he rejoined decisively. "I know what it is to be whacked, and I'd sooner be hungry! Look here! We can be pals, you know, me and you! I think I'll like you better'n a boy to chum up with, straight! What's your name?"

"Mary Bates; they call me Polly!" answered the waif simply.

"Don't know as I like Polly," returned the lad critically. "I'll call you Mary. So you're hungry, eh? Well, you wait there while I get somothin' to eat!"

He vanished, returning very quickly with a supply of fried fish, bread and pudding that had transformed the silver coin into three bronze ones, and lessened his capital by one-half.

"There you are!" he cried. "Now, go it for all you're worth!"

Mary Bates did ample justice to the repast, and when she had finished Johnnie proceeded to make her as comfortable as he could.

These two young persons were among the inhabitants of the great city who may be classed under the head of "Not wanted." Each was in the way, and in each case the flight was hailed with satisfaction by the unwilling guardian. They chatted together till they fell asleep, and in that curious conversation they settled their plans for the future.

In the morning Johnnie gave her twopence, keeping the odd penny for himself; that was to buy food with during the day, and they were to meet again at night under the same porch. Johnnie was to do as he had been doing for a month, picking up a livelihood somehow. Mary was also to busy herself about the market and the surrounding streets, in the hope of picking up a trifle in the way of food or money.

Johnnie was impressed by the fact that he had two persons to look after now, but he shouldered the added responsibility with quiet determination.

During the next few days a strong attachment was formed by the one for the other of this strange pair. Johnnie assumed the position of protector and bread-winner towards his little mate, and Mary accepted the position and grew very fond of him. Their affection was tried and cemented by an incident which occurred at the end of five days; this was a narrow escape from the clutches of a constable.

Johnnie had earned a few pence, and Mary had picked up a trifle also; they had purchased a cheap supper and had eaten it with all the relish of hunger. Then they had wended their steps towards the familiar porch in the corner of which it was their custom to sleep side by side.

They were talking in an animated fashion about what they intended to do when they were "growed up" and this caused them to neglect their ordinary precautions. They had

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ascended the three steps and were nearly in the arms of a man in uniform before they realised their danger.

"Scoot!" cried Johnnie, dragging Mary forcibly down the steps, just in time to evade the policeman's grasp. "Look out! He'll have us!"

They were off with the fleetness of young deer, and they did not stop till they were well out of that street. The policeman's mate must have been searching some other doorway; if the two had been together, Johnnie and his charge would have been caught, in all probability, and hauled off to the station and the workhouse afterwards.

"But why must we run?" asked Mary, when they felt secure.

"'Cos they'd have us up and they'd send us to some school, where we'd be treated awful strict!" answered Johnnie promptly.

"And whacked?" inquired Mary tearfully.

"Certain!" pronounced Johnnie confidently, although he felt some doubt rising within him as soon as he had given the answer.

"I wouldn't mind bein' sent to a school if they didn't whack you," observed Mary thoughtfully. "We could have jolly games together. I've heerd of boys and girls having games at school, and you and me could have fine fun, couldn't we?"

"Does yer think we'd be together?" asked Johnnie, with a mixture of pity and contempt for her ignorance. "'Corse we shouldn't! We'd be sent to different places!"

"What!" gasped Mary in dismay. "They mustn't part us! I couldn't bear it, could you?"

"No, I don't fink I could!" replied Johnnie mournfully. "But if the bobbies get us, that's what they'll do! I'm afeard they *will* get us one night. They, and the people from all sorts o' Homes, is always on the look-out! Some of my pals 'as been cotched!"

"I b'lieve I'd die if you was taken from me!" Mary began to sob. "Let's do something so as they can't take you from me, so as we must be together!"

"How?" asked Johnnie dubiously.

"If we was married," remarked little Mary thoughtfully, "they could do nuthin'. I've heerd Mrs. Potts scream out to Mr. Potts as no one could part her and him! How is that?"

"Oh, it's easy 'nough if you've got the money!" returned Johnnie confidently. "I've seed 'em go into the church! They stand and kneel afore some railin's, and a man says somethin' out of a book, and it's all over."

"We ain't got no money, I s'pose?" asked Mary disconsolately. "But wouldn't it be all the same," she demanded eagerly, as an idea struck her, "if we stood afore some railin's and took hold of hands and said as we wouldn't part?"

Johnnie didn't know; he said he would have to inquire, but they could make a bargain with each other not to part and to marry when they got enough money. Mary readily accepted the proposition, and the two children clasped hands and vowed to carry out the arrangement.

In making and ratifying a bargain in this way the waifs were doing exactly as many grown-up people do in certain localities all over the country, and to them this solemn shaking of hands was as binding as any vows ever exchanged between the contracting parties of a matrimonial alliance.

"That settles it!" declared Johnnie in a tone that admitted of no doubt concerning his sincerity. "We belong to one another, and we can't go and marry nobody else when we grows up!"

"And they can't take us away from one another now, can they?" asked Mary. She dreaded the idea of being separated from Johnnie and she was trying to persuade herself that separation was an impossibility.

"Not altogether," replied Johnnie dubiously. "You know that they keep the men and women apart in the workhouse, unless they're old, and we ain't old, you see!"

"I wish we was!" sighed Mary.

"The best way is not to let 'em get us!" declared Johnnie. "We must keep both eyes open for the copper at night!"

Although he was not certain about the question of separation, he was confident and jubilant concerning the impossibility of either getting married to another than to his or her present partner, and Mary held the same belief. That belief made them happy.

Their happiness, however, was of short duration. It was nearly a week later when Johnnie, arriving at the improvised lodging, found it occupied by a policeman. And as he (Johnnie) was a little earlier than the appointed time, he concluded that Mary had not arrived, so he had no hesitation in dashing away in order to escape his enemy.

He kept a watch for Mary, for the purpose of intercepting her, but he saw no sign of her although he waited till midnight. Then the truth came to him and made him sick at heart. Mary had been taken and would in due course be sent to a Home! He had lost his little wife!

Johnnie hung about the police court and workhouse, to his own imminent danger, in the hope of gleaning some tidings of Mary. If he could find out where they had taken her, he would contrive to effect her release! But his own fate was sealed; he was caught sleeping in a doorway two nights later and was sent to an industrial school.

The years rolled by. The two small persons wept bitterly over their separation at first, but in time their grief subsided and they benefited greatly by the care and training which they received. Those few days which they had passed together seemed something like a dream to them, and yet a dream with some reality about it.

Each cherished a loving memory of the other, and the childish vows exchanged between them appeared to retain all their force. Many a time, as the years passed by, each one had the same thought, even when they were old enough to fully understand the meaning of marriage.

"I'll never marry another girl if I live to be a hundred!" was the solemn declaration of Johnnie Owen, as he toiled away at the trade to which he had been apprenticed. And Mary Bates, old enough to act as maid to a young lady, ignored the eager glances cast at her pretty face by the young men of the neighbourhood and thought only of Johnnie Owen. "It may have been very foolish, and I may be very silly to still think of him," she would murmur, "but he was good to me and I shall always love him! I wonder where he is and what he is doing?"

Many a time, too, Mary Bates would catch herself glancing at the stalwart form of some young fellow and asking herself if Johnnie had grown into a man resembling that one. She would compare the visionary Johnnie with the substantial form on which her eyes had rested, and would speculate on the points of difference between them.

Then she would sigh and shake her head mournfully while she murmured, "I wonder if I shall ever see him again?" It did not occur to her for one instant that Johnnie had developed into a man whom she could not admire; that was an utter impossibility!

Eleven years had passed; she was twenty and she was in London again, her mistress having come to town for a brief stay. The return to the Metropolis had the effect of increasing her longing to learn something about Johnnie, to see him if possible. She tried to suppress the wild notions that flitted across her brain, but the more she tried, the more persistent did they become.

"How can I find out?" she asked herself. "It is so long ago! Perhaps he has earned enough to start in business on his own account; he was sharp-witted and strong, and therefore just the one to get on. Where could I inquire?"

She dared not intrust her secret to anyone, so she could not make much progress; she made a few tentative inquiries, but they were unsuccessful. Then an idea entered her mind which almost startled her.

"If I cannot see Johnnie, I can at least see the place where we sheltered during those few nights! Is the street still in existence? Dare I venture?"

She found that the street was still untouched by modern improvements, and that its reputation had not improved. It would be a risky thing for her to venture there at night, and, moreover, what was the good of doing so? Was it worth

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while, just to gratify a fancy? She dismissed the idea, but it came back with greater energy, and finally she yielded.

She obtained permission to remain out later than usual that night, and towards ten o'clock she found herself at the entrance of the familiar street. She was muffled in a cloak and in the darkness she might have been mistaken for a man.

Her heart beat more rapidly as she crept stealthily along the street, passing doorways in which, she was certain, homeless creatures were sleeping. A shiver of fear shook her frame when she realised that she was fairly within the boundaries of this dreaded locality, but the recollection of Johnnie Owen filled her with another sentiment and she forgot all danger.

"This is the spot!" she murmured as she stopped before a porch. "Is anyone there?"

Timidly she approached and ascended the three steps. How familiar it was, even after this long interval! The place was vacant, and she heaved a sigh of relief; yet she experienced a sentiment of disappointment which she could scarcely explain. Did she really expect to find Johnnie Owen sleeping there? And would she have been glad had it proved so?

She half knelt in the corner where they had lain, huddled together, and, drawing a box of wax matches from her pocket, she gently struck one and peered at some marks on the wall. Her eyes filled with tears as she saw them again, still readable after the lapse of years. No paint had covered them. "Johnnie. Mary."—Yes, there they were, a symbol of union! Would Johnnie and Mary ever be united?

"Never, I fear!" she breathed, rising to her feet and passing to the steps.

"Are you in need of help, my good woman?" asked a strong, manly voice with a touch of sympathy in it. "Can I help you?"

Mary shrank back. She wished to avoid the good Samaritans who go about in this way in order to help others.

"Thank you!" she faltered. "I was myself seeking to—to——"

"Who is it?" demanded the new-comer in quick, agitated tones.

In an instant a match was lighted by the stranger, who held it aloft in a manner that allowed its fitful gleam to fall for a minute on both faces.

"Mary Bates!" gasped the man. "*Is* it Mary or am I mistaken? I am Johnnie Owen! I came to see this place. I have been here often and often at night, wondering if I should ever get any news of Mary. You *are* Mary! Yes, I know!"

He dropped the match as he saw the expression on her face and was about to fold her in his arms when a thought arrested him.

"I had forgotten," he said tremulously. He took her hand. "We can shake hands, as old friends, but—but I was hoping, hoping, that each of us still held to the childish vows of eleven years ago! Perhaps it is not so? Mary, tell me and let me know my fate!"

"Why else should I be here?" she managed to stammer out, thankful that it was too dark for him to see how furiously she was blushing.

He folded her in his arms, happy in the reunion after so many years.

"Our names are still there, as we scratched them one night," he remarked, as they went away. "The next time we write our names in company, it will be in a church register!"

G. Hubert.

A MAN'S MISTAKE.

A Pathetic Little Love Story.

"Gwen, old girl, I'm in love."

A faint, pink flush crept into the girl's thin cheeks and made the pale, somewhat worn-looking face, seem almost pretty.

"You—in love?" she asked softly.

Her companion laughed, an awkward, half-apologetic sort of laugh.

"You never suspected it of me, did you?" he said.

"No," replied the girl, and her dark eyes grew strangely tender.

"I have told no one but you," he went on. "*She* wishes it to be a secret for the present."

All the colour went from her face. She looked haggard even in the dim firelight.

"A secret," she said. "Why a secret?"

"We've known each other such a short time, she is afraid people will laugh at us. They wouldn't understand, she says."

"I suppose not."

"But *you* understand, Gwen, don't you? I begged to be allowed to tell you. I wanted you to be the first to wish me joy."

"And I do, Tom. I do, with all my heart."

She spoke without a tremor in the low, clear voice

"It seems to me I have known her all my life, and she feels the same about me, Gwen."

"That is because you love each other."

"I knew you would understand!" he cried eagerly. "I told her so, Gwen. I told her all about you, about our friendship, and all I owe you."

"Was that necessary, Tom?"

"Necessary!" He laughed joyously "Why, Gwen, I have no secrets from her."

"No," said Gwen, "of course not."

"I know what you are thinking—she may possibly be jealous."

The girl started, as though she had been struck.

"Jealous of *me?*" she cried. "Who could be that?"

"To tell you the truth, Gwen, she was—just a little—at first. Then I explained to her what a good, true friend you had always been to me, and how I had learnt to love you as a sister, who was so much better, and wiser, and——"

"And older than you, Tom. I hope you told her that."

"I've never given it a thought, Gwen."

"I shall be twenty-nine next birthday. I daresay I might be forty-nine for all you cared. Tom, tell her that. It will satisfy her."

"She *is* satisfied. Do you remember, Gwen, what I've said to you so often? Men are your friends, not your lovers."

"I remember. There was something about me, you said, something you couldn't quite explain, which made me different from other women."

"Yes—and which separates you from their common fate. You're strong, and self-reliant, Gwen. You know how to make your way in the world, and you want no man's help. I sometimes think it's that that keeps us at arm's length. We know that you can do without us, that you don't need our protection, and so we shrink from offering it. You're too brave for us, Gwen."

The girl smiled strangely

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"Perhaps you're right," she said, "but you didn't come here to talk about me. What is she like, Tom?"

His face kindled.

"Other people call her charming and pretty," he said, "but to me she is the most beautiful woman in the world. And yet she is hardly a woman, but a lovely, innocent child, Gwen, and as helpless as a child."

"And that you love most of all," said the girl. "You love to take care of her."

He began to laugh, from sheer happiness.

"She is so young—barely eighteen—and so ignorant of the world. Life, for her, is full of dangers. Oh, I must guard her well. Gwen, if you only knew the joy a man has in the helplessness of the woman he loves!"

"I think I understand," she said. "Let me see her picture."

"How did you know?" he asked, with a shamefaced smile, and drew from his pocket a tiny leather case.

She stirred the glowing coals into flame, and knelt on the hearthrug to examine the portrait.

It was a pretty, commonplace little face, with a somewhat affected expression—possibly due to the photographer, Gwen reflected.

"It's not a good likeness," said Tom, looking over her shoulder, "and, of course, all the colouring is lost. She has lovely hair—bright gold when the sun is on it—and a *real* complexion, Gwen, like a young child's."

"She must be very pretty."

"I wish you could see her, but you will soon, I hope. She's coming to town, with her people, next month."

"Mayn't I know her name?"

"Of course. I'd quite forgotten you didn't know. It's Lucy Mannering."

She noticed how fondly his voice lingered on the name.

"Lucy," she said. "I think it suits her, and I remember now that you mentioned her in your letter. She has been staying with the Harwoods, too, hasn't she? I know now," she added, with a light little laugh, "why you wrote to me so seldom, Tom."

"I was a selfish beggar and I've never asked you, Gwen, how you've been getting on. Splendidly, as usual, of course?"

She smiled a little bitterly.

"If you choose to call it that," she said. "I can always get plenty of work."

"And you deserve it."

"Such as it is."

"Oh, come now, Gwen, you, a successful journalist, oughtn't to talk like this. Why, thousands of women would give anything for your position."

"I daresay."

"But not many of them have got your brains or your enterprise."

"Don't you think so?"

"I always said you were bound to succeed, Gwen, when I watched how you stood up against all odds, how you smiled at rebuffs that would have made other women weep, how you bearded the editors in their dens and calmly told them that your stuff was what they wanted, and how, when they declined your manuscripts time after time, you only laughed and declared that your hour would come some day—do you remember, Gwen?"

"Yes, I remember," she said wearily.

"And your hour has come!"

"Yes, I got what I wanted, Tom."

"I knew you would. You are so cool and plucky and unmoved, Gwen. Sometimes I feel almost afraid of you."

"Afraid—of me?"

She stared at him, with wide eyes full of pain.

"*Almost* afraid," he said. "You are so different from other women. Sometimes, Gwen, you are almost unnatural, you seem so proud and strong and independent."

"If he only knew," she whispered to herself, and in that moment she realised the vast gulf that stretched between her and this man who understood her so little.

"Forgive me if I send you away now," she said presently. "I have a story to finish for *The Epoch* to-night, and it's weighing on my mind."

"Weighing on your mind!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe you allow anything to weigh on your mind, Gwen."

"Don't you?" she asked listlessly. How little he understood!

The Editor of the *The Epoch* had rejected her last contribution, with a curt note to the effect that the story was scarcely up to her usual mark.

No one but Gwen herself knew how she winced beneath that criticism, as beneath every rebuff of the same sort. They were plentiful in her profession, but somehow that did not make them easier to bear.

To her editors and colleagues, Gwen seemed a case-hardened journalist who pocketed snubs cheerfully, as a matter of course, and showed a commendable appreciation of her own ability.

They little guessed what agonies of doubt and self-distrust the girl endured at every business interview, at every post that brought back a rejected manuscript; what bitter tears she shed in secret; how, at times, she would cry out in her loneliness and feel afraid—desperately, hopelessly afraid of the struggle that lay before her, the sordid, miserable struggle for mere bread-and-cheese that had been her lot almost ever since she could remember.

The success that had fallen to her share had cheered her, but it did not suffice to set at rest the terrible doubt of herself and her powers that tormented her so persistently.

Sometimes, at the end of a more than usually hard spell of work, her over-taxed brain would suddenly refuse to respond further to her call upon it, and then an awful fear would seize her—the fear that she had come to the end of her resources, that her stock-in-trade of ideas had been exhausted, that she had, in fact, "written herself out."

At such times she would sit at her desk for hours, wild-eyed and white-faced, unable to pen a single line, wondering desperately what the end of it all would be.

And then, all at once, in the midst of her misery, a thought would come to her, bringing a light to her tired eyes, and a flush to her cheeks, that seemed to transfigure the anxious face and make it strangely beautiful.

She was not altogether friendless. *He* had told her, again and again, in his boyish, impulsive fashion, that he admired her more than any other woman in the world; and though she smiled at his extravagance, it was infinitely soothing to her.

He had never pretended to be in love with her. Indeed, he had hurt her often enough by his thoughtless, outspoken comments upon his own and other men's attitudes towards her.

But—there had been no other woman.

Perhaps, some day—who could tell?—he might—he might—Gwen never got beyond this point. She was proud; she tried to be proud, even to herself.

It was pride that made her smile her calmest smile when she was most discouraged and depressed; pride that made her silent in her suffering, even before *him*, and when he understood her least made it the more impossible for her to undeceive him.

There had been no other woman.

Well, that was over now.

"My love to Lucy," she said, as Tom bade her good-bye that night.

"My love to Lucy," she whispered to herself, when the door had closed behind him.

Then she began to laugh.

She was too proud to cry.

Grete Hahn.

Mrs. Sequel: "I understand your husband can't meet his creditors." Mrs. Equal: "I don't believe he wants to, especially."

Nodd: "I think that doctor of mine will give us something to stop baby's crying now." Todd: "Why?" Nodd: "I'm going to move next door to him."

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Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*

And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." Three more lists will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

NINTH LIST.

97. AADEFLRSU	**103. AEEKLMSS** .....
98. ABCEGHLOSWY	**104. ABBCEELORSTTU** .....
99. AACEGINRRST	**105. ADEEGLNNY** .....
100. AABLLMOR	**106. ACHHIKLLPUW** .....
101. BCENOORSY	**107. DEEFIMNORRSU** .....
102. CEGHHNOOST	**108. ACEEFILSWYY** .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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MR. HOLT'S COUSIN.

The Romance of a Wounded Man and His Amanuensis.

"I'm very sorry for you, Leigh!"

"Thanks. You've said that before, though."

"Well, you need not be so disagreeable; I really am sorry for you, and would help you if I could."

The speaker was an elderly man, with an intellectual face and a head of tangled grey hair, who stood by a couch, on which lay a young man with his head bandaged and his arm in a sling—the victim of an accidental collision with a 'bus in Fleet Street.

"You had better try and put it all out of your mind for a month," he went on compassionately. "You can't work, so what's the good of worrying?"

"The fact that I can't work is the reason why I worry," said Leigh. "If I had only finished my book before this accident happened I shouldn't care. But publishers are like time and tide—they wait for no man, as you might know, one would think!"

"I thought the doctor did not want you to use your head at all," said the elder man.

"Oh! He doesn't mind now. I'm all right again really; only he says he must keep my eyes bandaged for another fortnight, 'just as a precautionary measure.' Precautionary humbug, I call it!"

"Well then, employ an amanuensis," said Morris Holt, taking no notice of the last remark.

"So I would, if I could find one worth having; but how can I find one while I'm stuck here on this sofa? And, somehow, when a fellow is ill, people seem such a bother."

"I have a young cousin whom I think might do," said Holt. "I never thought of it till this minute; I always forget everything! A college graduate. Has written some creditable articles for the *Dispatch*, and the Editor says is destined to achieve distinction. Comparatively unknown, and too poor to ask high terms; very accurate, a good scholar, and would be glad to accept the position of amanuensis."

"Well, that praise means something from you," said Leigh, rather grudgingly. "We might have an interview to-morrow afternoon, anyway, if you'll arrange it for me."

"All right; I must be off now. I only meant to stay two minutes, but I had no idea you had been so ill."

He shook the uninjured hand, and made his way towards the door, tripping against a stool as he peered short-sightedly for the handle.

A shout from Leigh made him pause as he was closing the door.

"Stop a minute! What name did you say?"

"Holt. Sydney Holt," he said, opening the door an inch or two and shutting it again.

"Poor chap!" he muttered, as he made his way down the stairs of the flat. "But it's just the thing for Sydney. I'll go round there now."

Morris Holt was one of the most oblivious and absent-minded men in the world, but he had a fund of kindness within him when he remembered to use it, and on this cold, wet November evening he went nearly a mile out of his way that he might convey the news of employment to his young relative at once.

It was a dingy street into which he turned, and the house at which he stopped was one of the dingiest of the row. An untidy servant-girl admitted him, and stood aside to let him go up to the first floor.

Mr. Holt stumbled up the dark staircase and knocked at the first door he came to.

"Come in!" cried a voice from the inside, and he turned the handle and entered. The room was like hundreds of others in cheap lodging-houses. The furniture was worn and shabby, the ceiling discoloured, and the window-panes not very clean; but there were a few touches here and there which showed that the occupant was a person of refinement.

A girl, whose curly hair was cut short over her head, and whose pale face showed the marks of overwork, threw down her pen and rose to greet him with a smile.

"Why, Cousin Morris!" she said; "I have not seen you for weeks!"

"No, my dear," said Mr. Holt, sitting down in the chair she pushed forward for him. "I have been out of town. Called at Grant's office yesterday, expecting to see you, but learnt that you had completed your work there a week ago. What have you been doing since, Sydney?"

"Nothing; that is, nothing certainly remunerative. I have just been engaged on a sketch that I hope to dispose of to one of the literary papers."

"I am sorry I have not been able to help you more," said Mr. Holt, with a little remorse in his tones. "But it is next door to impossible; everything is so crowded. However, I am forgetting what I came to tell you, and I must make haste, because I am going out of town again to-morrow, and I am very busy. A friend of mine who is writing a book has had an accident, and can't use his eyes for a time. He is worrying himself to death about it, and wants to get someone to help him. It must be someone up in the classics, because there are a lot of French quotations, so I suggested you, and he would like you to go round to-morrow afternoon. There's the address."

He threw a card on the table as he spoke, and got up to go.

"But shall I be able to do what he wants?" said Sydney doubtfully.

"Oh, yes; I told him all about you, you know, and he thought you would do."

There were many other things that Sydney wanted to ask, but her cousin was in a hurry to be off, and she could not detain him. She stood for a long time with the card in her hand after he had gone, as though it could tell her all the things that he had left unsaid.

OLIVER LEIGH,
18, Bloomsbury Square.

That was all. She had never heard the name before, and it conveyed nothing to her mind. But she had no doubt about going, for her funds were so low that it seemed to her sometimes as though starvation were not far off.

Her hopes had been very high when she had completed her

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education, and tried to obtain a position as teacher in a school; but as she learnt more and more of the over-stocked condition of the teaching world, they had sunk lower and lower. Her cousin had no influence with anyone of importance in London, but he had procured her a few pieces of literary hack-work from time to time, which just kept her head above water.

She set out about three o'clock the next afternoon, and made her way to Bloomsbury Square, and to the number designated, which proved to be a flat-house. She pressed the electric button of the door, and a bright little boy admitted her.

"Mr. Leigh?" he said, in answer to her inquiry. "Yes, he's in. Second floor," and so saying, he disappeared down a passage, leaving Sydney to make her way up.

The door at the head of the second staircase stood open, and her timid knock was answered by a voice, in obedience to which she entered.

The room formed a strong contrast to her own. A bright fire burnt in a grate, throwing its leaping lights and shadows over the picture-covered walls and the soft hues of carpet and curtains. But Sydney's eyes were not attracted by the room; they were fixed in mute surprise upon its owner.

She had expected to see an elderly, grey-headed man, like her cousin; but the hair that appeared over the bandages was thick and dark, and the figure in the armchair was that of a man in the prime of youth. She was so taken aback that she hesitated on the threshold, uncertain what to do; but in the meantime he could not see her and she was obliged to speak.

"My cousin, Mr. Morris Holt, asked me to call on you to-day about some work," she said.

"Oh, yes; come in," said Leigh. "Excuse my getting up; I'm rather lame. Holt was here yesterday, and said he thought you could do what I want; but I shoud think you're very young by your voice!"

Sydney thought that his manners were decidedly peculiar, but she knew that she must not mind such things as these.

"Yes, I am young," she said, "but I am fairly well educated, and have had some experience in literary work, too."

"Oh, well, I daresay you'll do all right," said Leigh. "I'll try you, anyhow. My doctor says I mustn't do more than three hours' work a day at present. He's a chum of mine, who comes in every morning to bandage me up for the day, and all that kind of thing; so we had better work from two till five, if that will suit you."

"Very well, indeed," said Sydney.

"All right, then. We ought to finish the work in a fortnight; I hope you can write a clear hand. Oh, and about terms; will two pounds a week do for you?"

"Certainly," said Sydney, who had not dared to expect so much.

"We may as well begin at once, then. You'll find the papers on the writing-table. Tell me when you are ready, and I'll fire away."

Sydney arranged the papers and began to write. The book was one dealing with certain aspects of the French drama, showing that many of the so-called new Society plays of the day were really founded on dramas well-known in France from thirty to a hundred years ago. The quotations made the work difficult; but the subject was one which thoroughly interested her, and the time sped rapidly away.

Five o'clock chimed out at last from the little clock on the mantelpiece, and Leigh gave a satisfied sigh.

"I suppose we must stop," he said, "or I shall get into a row with my doctor. However, we've got on capitally, so I won't complain. Be sure you come punctually to-morrow."

"I will be certain to be here," said Sydney, opening the door as she spoke.

"All right, and if you see your cousin, you can tell him I think you'll do very well. You really are very clever, though I should think you're not much more than a boy!"

Sydney gave a startled little gasp as he muttered the last words, and escaped before he could add anything more. So this was the meaning of his cursory remarks and his off-hand way! Morris had evidently spoken of her as his "cousin," without mentioning her name; or, even if he had mentioned it, it would have told him nothing unless he added an explanation. Why had she not been called Ada or Caroline instead of Sydney?

During her journey home she was debating what she could do. Should she ask her cousin to explain? But he had gone out of town, and she did not even know his address. Should she explain the mistake herself? But the idea was too formidable! And after all, it was only an hour or two in the day for a fortnight; it would soon be over.

She hardly noticed the discomforts of her room that evening; her mind was too much occupied with the events of the day, and instead of worrying over her money troubles when she went to bed, she fell asleep wondering what the morrow would bring.

Leigh was waiting for her when she arrived the next afternoon.

"Here you are!" he said, cheerfully. "The doctor says

"I say, young man, you ought not to leave your love tokens lying about."

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I'm none the worse for the work yesterday, so that's all right. We'll soon finish, at this rate."

Sydney soon became as interested in the book as the author himself. It showed a depth of research and a broad way of dealing with facts that gave her a very high opinion of his mind. She admired him also for his patience under the trials that had befallen him, and day by day she found herself looking forward more eagerly to their hours of work.

Leigh, on his part, felt a growing admiration for his secretary.

"You never bother me, somehow," he said, one day. "Some fellows are so clumsy, knocking things over and making all sorts of mistakes. But you are uncommonly quiet, I must say, and yet you are sharp enough, too! That suggestion you made yesterday was really very good; I thought about it a great deal in the night."

"I am glad you think I can do the work," said Sydney.

"You do it remarkably well," said Leigh. "You really ought to turn out something or other very creditable one of these days. I don't know why I always imagine you are so young; I suppose it's your voice."

"Can I do anything more for you before I go?" said Sydney, passing over the difficult question.

"Yes. I wish you would just give me a rug. I get so cold sitting here, and the doctor won't let me try my ankle yet."

Sydney felt a rush of sympathy go through her, but she dared not express it. So she put the rug softly over him and went back to the writing-table.

"Recently I have felt in a poetic mood," said Leigh, in a dreamy tone. "I don't know why, but I seemed to think of stars and music, and the sweet South on a bank of violets, all in a breath just now."

"Good afternoon," said Sydney, opening the door and taking a sudden departure.

"I shall have to tell him," she said to herself desperately, as she hastened down the stairs. "And yet—there are only three days more!"

"I say, young man," began Leigh, in a playful tone, when his amanuensis arrived on the next afternoon, "you ought not to leave your love tokens about on other people's tables! The doctor told me I might take a walk around my room this morning; the housekeeper was to have helped me, but she never appeared, so I had to clutch on to the things as best I could, and as I caught hold of the writing-table, I found this!"

He held up a ribbon as he spoke, which Sydney recognised directly as one that she had missed when she reached home.

"Well, are you not going to ask for it back?" said Leigh, finding that he got no answer. "I shall tell your cousin the little tale when I see him next!"

"Please give it to me," said Sydney, in a low voice.

Leigh thought that he had given offence, and relinquished the ribbon at once. It seemed to him rather foolish to be upset by such a trivial thing, but he was too kind-hearted not to try to make amends.

"I shall be quite sorry when our work comes to an end!" he said pleasantly, when five o'clock sounded the hour of Sydney's departure.

"So shall I!" thought Sydney, but she did not say so.

"In fact," went on Leigh, "I have something to propose to you. The doctor says the bandage may come off my eyes in a day or two, but I am not to use them much at first. Will you stay on and help me, if you have nothing better to do? No one has ever suited me so admirably as you have done, and I do not feel inclined to let you go."

Sydney's heart beat almost to suffocation. How could she answer him? In a day or two at most he must discover the deception she had practised on him.

"You don't seem to like the idea much!" said Leigh, in a disappointed tone. "Perhaps you have something else in view; but I gathered from what your cousin told me that you have not been getting on very encouragingly. Has your father other plans for you?"

"I have no father," said Sydney, glad of a question that she could reply to. "I have been an orphan for some years, and I never had any brothers or sisters."

"Then why will you not agree to my proposal?" said Leigh. "It would be only a temporary thing, and I would not stand in the way of your taking anything else that turned up."

"It is not that," said Sydney, in a low voice.

"What is it then?" asked Leigh, rather peremptorily.

Sydney could not reply, her heart was too full. She felt her eyes filling with tears, and in the effort to choke down her feelings a sob escaped her lips.

Leigh gave a sudden start, and half rose from his seat, but sank back again as his injured foot gave way under him. Sydney watched him anxiously; she dared not speak, but in another moment she saw him raise his hand as though to tear the bandage from his eyes.

"No! no!" she cried, fear for him overcoming every other feeling; "you must not do it; you will ruin your sight for ever." She darted forward as she spoke and seized his hand.

Instead of snatching away his hand, Leigh took hers between both his own, and held it firmly. It quivered like a frightened bird in the captor's grasp, but he would not let it go. It was small, and soft, and warm, and he stroked it lightly with his fingers.

"This is not a man's hand!" he said.

"Oh, I will tell you the truth!" cried Sydney despairingly. "My cousin told me about your work, and I wanted the money so much, and he said that he had told you all about me. And then when I came I found you did not know, and he was away, and I could not make up my mind to tell you, and I hoped you would never find it out! But now I will go away, and I shall never come back."

She drew her hand away from him, but as he released it, he pulled the bandage from his eyes before she knew what he was doing!

The sight that met his eyes he will never forget till his dying day. The small, slight figure before him was clad in a dress of some dark woollen material, that any woman would have told him at once was old-fashioned and cheap. But Leigh saw nothing of that; he only knew that the curls that lay tossed all over the little head glittered like gold in the firelight, that the pale cheeks were tinged with delicate colour, and that her eyes shone like stars through the tears that hung on their lashes!

But the vision only lasted for a moment. Turning passionately from him, she caught up her things and flew from the room.

How Sydney found her way home that evening she never knew. A tumult of feelings surged through her heart, but in the midst of it all one resolve was fixed within her—nothing should ever take her back! What though her work was unfinished; what though she had not as yet received the much-needed money? She would rather starve than ever see him again!

Leigh, meanwhile, was passing through an equal tumult, but his thoughts were much pleasanter than Sydney's. His principal fear was that she would fulfil her threat of not returning; and as the next afternoon came and went, dragging out its weary hours in dull loneliness, he became gradually convinced that she had really meant what she said.

"Never mind, I'll go and see her to-morrow," he thought. "I can get downstairs and into a cab well enough now."

But when the next day came a sudden thought flashed upon him that filled him with dismay. He had not the vaguest notion of her address; and, more than this, rave and storm as he might, there was no chance of his finding it out unless her cousin had come back to town!

He had been allowed to exchange his bandage for a shade, and reaching pen and paper he wrote off a hasty note, with no explanations, merely asking for the address.

But Morris Holt was still out of town, and the note lay unopened amid a pile of letters on his writing-table for several days, during which Leigh went through an agony of suspense. Perhaps his note had been lost, and had never reached its destination; perhaps she had guessed what he would do, and had forbidden her cousin to send the address.

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Then a new agony began. She had told him herself how much she wanted the money; perhaps she was starving, and there was no one to help her. He worried and distressed himself till the doctor shook his head and ordered him to take a trip south.

Leigh took no notice of his advice. Everything seemed to go by him in a dream, until one day a postcard was brought up to him, with two lines written upon it, that ran like an electric stream through his frame. The words were these:

"Only just back in town. No. 24, Watts Street."

Sydney was sitting alone that afternoon in her cheerless room. She could not afford a fire, and the clinging damp made everything chilly and uncomfortable. She had at last heard of a chance to teach a private school, but the salary was small.

A week ago at this time a very different scene had surrounded her, but that thought was too painful to be borne as yet! A ring at the bell and a heavy step on the stairs roused no expectations in Sydney's mind; no one ever came to see her but her cousin, and she thought that he was still away. But to her surprise, the steps paused at her door, and the servant-girl threw it open without any attempt at announcement, and in another moment Oliver Leigh stood before her.

He was breathless with his ascent, and leant heavily upon his stick; but he had left off his bandages, and his eyes rested eagerly upon her.

"I should have been here days ago," he exclaimed, "but I had no clue to your address, and I was obliged to wait until I could get it from your cousin. The days have seemed like an eternity!"

He pulled the bandage from his eyes before she knew what he was doing.

He paused; but Sydney could find no words in which to answer.

"Are you angry with me for coming?" he asked. "You would not be, if you knew how terribly I have missed you."

"I am not angry," said Sydney, in a scarcely audible voice, while she raised her eyes for a moment to his.

Leigh's face brightened.

"I cannot part from you again!" he exclaimed. "I have come here to-day to ask you to be my wife."

"But we have known each other such a little time," said Sydney, trying to repress the joy that trembled through her at his words. She knew that she should never love any other man as she loved him, but she feared that he might be yielding to a sudden impulse which he would afterwards repent.

"Do you call it a little while?" he said. "It seems to me that I have known you for years. You must remember that a fortnight of work together like ours is worth a year of ordinary acquaintance. No, I cannot take that as an answer. The only thing that will send me away is for you to tell me that you do not love me. Can you tell me that?"

There was an intreating accent in his voice against which Sydney was not proof.

"No," she said, softly, and the brief negative conveyed a whole world of assent.

The dreary room, with all its chill dulness disappeared as if by magic, transfigured and glorified by a haze of golden light.

Cold, weariness, poverty, all were forgotten, blotted out from Sydney's memory, by the sudden rush of happiness; while Leigh felt that this was the moment for which he had been waiting all his life.

"You must not forget that you owe me two days' work," he said, at last, looking at her with a smile.

"I don't owe them!" said Sydney playfully. "You have never paid me anything yet at all!"

Leigh's smile faded, and he bowed his head on hers.

"I can't bear to think of what you have suffered, my little one!" he said. "But that is all over now. There is nothing to wait for; let us be married at once, and we will arrange for a wedding trip. I believe the doctor told me I ought to go down south for a little while—say to Bournemouth; so we will forget all these dark days in love and sunshine! I shall never be thankful enough that your cousin sent you to me."

"Do you think we need tell him all the story?" said Sydney anxiously.

"No, dear, no!" said Leigh. "It is too sweet a story to be spoilt by telling; we will keep it all to ourselves."

And thus it came to pass that when Morris Holt read the letter that told him of Sydney's engagement he said to himself with his usual abstracted smile:

"Ah, yes, I saw Leigh was interested directly I told him about her; Sydney may thank me, after all, for having settled her in life."

M. Milner.

Mrs. Bacon: "Is this young salad?" Bridget: "Yes, ma'am, so young that I had to wash and dress it."

Excited Wife: "Wake up, Henry! The house is on fire!" Sleepy Husband: "Great Heavens! Now we'll have to move again!"

Pretty School Teacher: "Thomas, state some of the beauties of education." Thomas (oldest boy in the class): "Schoolmistresses."

Agony Column Notice: "Teddy, come back. All is forgiven. Pa kicked the wrong man. He did not know it was you.—Stella."

"What was the trouble between you and young Mr. Softy?" "Why, he said his brain was on fire, and I broke a hand grenade over his head."

Husband: "You're not economical." Wife: "Well, if you don't call a woman economical who saves her wedding-dress for a possible second marriage, I'd like to know what you think economy is!"

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A Fraudulent Bankrupt.

Telling of a Good Intention and Broken Engagement.

With a meditative kind of sigh, Mr. Richard Granville laid the newspaper on his writing-table by the side of a letter to which was attached a cheque for £150. The newspaper and letter had reached him by the same post; the newspaper was a daily journal published in the town in which Granville had lived till five years previously.

"So this is what may be called the end of "The Fraudulent Bankruptcy Case," murmured Granville. "The *Express* tells me that Laxton has completed the payment of his creditors, interest and all, and the letter comes from Laxton with the balance of the money lent to him in order to give him a fresh start. And what about Winnie? I wonder if she ever deigns to give a thought to me?"

Business in the solicitor's office was not brisk that morning; so, when Granville fell into a day-dream and lived that incident over again, there was nothing to interrupt the course of his meditation.

Richard Granville was, at the time of that incident, a man of forty-five. He had never been married; he had devoted himself to the law, and after a great deal of hard work, he had acquired a very comfortable business in his native town. And then, like so many other men before and since, his thoughts had turned to matrimony and he had fallen violently in love with Miss Winnie Saunders, the daughter of a large manufacturer in the same town.

There was not the slightest doubt that it was purely a heart affair with Granville; the appearance of Winnie had worked a transformation in his inmost being.

He was amazed at the thought that he had lived so long without passing through the experience of love; it was almost incredible that he could have been so dulled by the desire to get on that he should have entirely escaped the arrows of Cupid.

Yet it was so; this was no case of a disappointment in earlier life. He realised for the first time what was meant by being in love! And, as is usually the case, he was in love with a vengeance!

There was some disparity between the ages of the two lovers; for Winnie was not yet thirty, and still looked very charming, whereas Granville, as already stated, was fifteen years older. However, a difference of that kind is not a serious obstacle, and the couple became engaged.

Looking back, Granville was inclined to query the affection of Winnie for himself; something within him said that she accepted him because she wanted a husband not engaged in manufacture, but a member of a profession.

Was it love or ambition that made her reply in the affirmative to his impassioned declaration and question? When such questions arose in his mind, Granville brushed them aside and loyally adhered to the belief that Winnie did love him and that it was all his fault or the fault of circumstances—he could not decide which.

It had all come about through the Laxton bankruptcy.

About a month after the announcement of the engagement of Granville and Miss Saunders, the town was surprised by the statement that Laxton had fled, after having collected most of the money owing to him, and leaving some heavy debts of his own unsettled.

Little by little the details became known, and then it was found that Laxton had obtained large supplies of goods from Saunders and others, and had immediately disposed of these goods for cash. With this money he had decamped, leaving Saunders and others in a towering rage at having been sold in that manner. Laxton's credit had been good, and the defrauded merchants had only done what they had done many times before.

Mr. Saunders was furious; his own people could scarcely approach him, and Granville dare not go near him for a day or two. Saunders was not much in favour of having Granville for a son-in-law; the solicitor was not rich enough. Winnie was in tears.

"I wish something could be done to get the money back, Richard!" she moaned. "Papa is not hard up, so far as I know, but bad debts have been rather plentiful of late, and he is always as cross as two sticks if he loses only a few pounds. But, to make things worse, people are saying that it serves papa right, because he accepted bills from Laxton and charged him a heavy rate of interest for the accommodation. I think that means that Laxton did not pay on a monthly account, but got four or six months' credit.

"And then"—here Winnie hesitated—"papa says that if you—if you—I don't like to say it!"

"Tell me what he said, my love!" requested Granville, feeling uncomfortable.

"He said that if you were a smart lawyer, you ought to be able to get his money back for him! Papa says that if Laxton's affairs are simply wound up and a warrant issued for his arrest, *that* won't bring the money back! If Laxton is put in prison even, *that* won't make the loss less to papa! Do you think you could see any way to get papa's money out of Laxton, Richard? It would be such a feather in your cap, and papa would think such a lot of you ever afterwards!"

That was rather a big task, but Granville's anxiety to please Winnie and to get into the good graces of her father, made him daring.

"It is not an impossibility!" he said reflectively. "It might be done. I'll think it over, Winnie, and try!"

"Oh, I should be *so* glad, Richard! Thank you so much!"

Granville was not satisfied with verbal expressions of gratitude from his loved one, and the kisses which he demanded intoxicated him and caused him to become more sanguine of success. By the time he left Winnie he had as good as promised that he would get the money back.

On the following morning he looked somewhat blankly at his own reflection in the mirror. Nevertheless, he had promised to undertake the case, and he must do his best.

"I must find out where he is, that's the first move!" said Granville disconsolately. "Then I suppose I must go to him and threaten that I will haul him up before the police unless he gives me what he owes to Saunders. Rather shady conduct for me, yet——"

He slowly shook his head and turned from the mirror.

Granville felt tolerably certain that Laxton would not attempt to leave the country; he sat down to think where the missing man would most likely take refuge, and he suddenly remembered a remark dropped by the bankrupt three or four

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months before—a remark overheard and not intended for the ears of others. Granville saw its meaning in the light of later events, and he jumped up with an exclamation.

"I'll wager that he's in London, in the East End!" he cried. "He might start such a business there, or buy up one, and nobody would suspect that he was there! I'll set Mallett at work!"

Mallett was a private inquiry agent. He received full particulars of Laxton's appearance and some other details, and two days afterwards he replied that he had located the individual mentioned. Granville gave it out that urgent business called him to London and he was off by the next train.

"It isn't an elegant locality where the fellow has settled!" remarked Mallett drily, when his friend Granville called on him. "You might have placed a little more confidence in me, by telling me what he has done!"

Granville reddened.

"I am prepared to swear that he is no ordinary criminal!" said Mallett quietly. "I'll tell you what *I* think of him before you say a word. He is an honest-minded man who has had a run of ill-luck which has made him forget himself and deviate from the right path!"

"You've about hit the nail on the head!" cried Granville in surprise. "How did you deduce that? But, to show that I wish to keep nothing from you, I will tell you all I know!"

He related the story of the bankruptcy, and Mallett began to ask questions.

"Well," said Granville slowly in reply, "I have found out that this Laxton has had a lot of trouble. Fate seems to have been against him lately. His wife was ailing for years, and that took money out of his pocket. His two children died, trade went wrong, competition was keen, men like Saunders charged a high rate of interest for taking his bills of acceptance, and finally his wife died.

"It appeared as though misfortune would pour down upon him till he went under, and at last he did go under. Now, what is the best course to pursue? You are a good judge of human nature, I should say, or you wouldn't get on so well in your special line!"

"I should call upon him," said Mallett with a quiet smile, "and have a friendly chat with him. I know that my advice will surprise you, but I'll undertake to say that you will get nearer to the attainment of your object than if you adopt any other method!

"Exactly what course he will adopt in order to make restitution I cannot say, but I prophesy that he doesn't like his present occupation and that he would be glad to find himself free to go about and make a fresh start in his own line elsewhere! With a fair show, that man ought to succeed moderately; he has a good amount of business acumen!"

Granville didn't like the idea; he became reflective and shuffled his feet nervously.

"It's your best course!" said Mallett. "I see that you understand that you must go alone, and you don't like it! Well, if you take half a dozen policemen or detectives with you, you'll do nothing!"

"You're right!" admitted Granville regretfully. "Which is the best time?"

"Near midnight!" replied Mallett promptly. "This is Saturday," he went on, ignoring Granville's shudder, "and he will be tired of work, sick of this new and distasteful business. He will be closing up, so you will get him at just the best time to work on his feelings. It will be what people are fond of calling the psychological moment!"

The idea put forward by Mallett was a novel one; it interested Granville, although he would have preferred not to be compelled to carry it out alone. Nevertheless, he summoned up courage and went to the street named by his friend. He had no difficulty in finding it, for it had earned a notoriety of a disagreeable character!

Granville was attired in a manner suitable to his position, but certainly not suited to the locality. Two or three suspicious-looking individuals eyed him furtively, making him feel uneasy, but he went boldly on his way.

"It is for Winnie's sake!" muttered Granville. "I wouldn't do it for Saunders himself; but the dear girl thinks it would be good, and so—Oh, this is No. 7, I suppose!"

It was a low-class eating and lodging-house, frequented chiefly by sailors. It was not a thieves' den, where sailors are fleeced, but its former proprietor had endeavoured to establish a place where the tars might feel safe and get fair value for their money. Honesty paid him well, for Jack is generous, and he usually got well paid for looking after the sailors ashore.

Laxton, then, had taken this house! It was a strange haven of refuge, but Granville conceded that he was probably safer there than elsewhere from the chance of discovery and arrest!

The solicitor entered while a man was putting up the shutters; that man was the fraudulent bankrupt; the lawyer recognised him. Laxton had not noticed him enter the shop, so, when his task was finished, he locked the front door and turned to walk back to his little parlour. As he turned, with uplifted hand, to extinguish the gas jets as he went along, he saw Granville and stood still in surprise.

"What are you here for?" he demanded at length. He spoke fiercely, his fists clenched, as one prepared to fight for liberty. "Speak! What do you mean by coming here? How did you track me?"

He stepped forward with a threatening gesture. Granville wished himself at home, but he presented a brave front, and spoke in a conciliatory style.

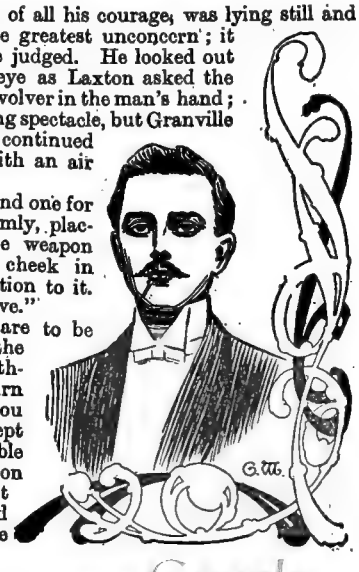
"I have come to have a chat with you about your bankruptcy, Mr. Laxton! Don't be alarmed! I wish you no harm, but I think it will be possible to——"

He was unable to proceed, for Laxton had sprung upon him with a hiss like that of a serpent, and had him by the throat. Granville had been pretty good at wrestling in his young days, but many years had gone by without practice and his art was lost. He made as good a struggle as he could, not raising the least cry, because he wished to keep the shop to Laxton and himself, if possible. He anathematised Mallett and Saunders, but he was in the mess now and must go through with it.

He essayed to make Laxton understand that he bore him no ill-will, but Laxton would hear nothing. In three minutes Granville lay helpless on the floor, Laxton still holding him, though not so tightly, by the throat.

"I thought I was safe here!" panted the fugitive. "But you have got your detectives to track me! I don't know what your game is, but I'll never allow you and your men to take me! See this?"

Granville, by the aid of all his courage, was lying still and assuming a look of the greatest unconcern; it was the best policy, he judged. He looked out of the corner of his eye as Laxton asked the question, and saw a revolver in the man's hand; it was not a tranquillising spectacle, but Granville nerved himself and continued gazing at the ceiling with an air of indifference.



"One ball for you and one for me!" said Laxton grimly, placing the muzzle of the weapon against the solicitor's cheek in order to call his attention to it. "I'll never be taken alive."

"Nobody says you are to be taken," remarked the solicitor easily, and without attempting to turn his head. "When you think that you have kept me in this uncomfortable and undignified position long enough, you might permit me to rise and have that chat I spoke

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about. I must say that you don't treat your visitors very courteously!"

Laxton was puzzled. He gazed curiously at his prisoner for a few seconds, then released him and rose slowly to his feet.

"You can get up!" he said, and his tone was that of a mystified man. "I'm done—I can't understand! What are you getting at?"

"I hope you have a clothes-brush!" said Granville, rising and dusting his things with his hands. "Well, shall we go into the parlour?"

"You haven't anyone outside, ready to pounce on me?"

"How can they, with the door locked?" asked Granville.

"No! I forgot that, although they could get in by the private door. Well, come in, I have another way out if anyone is really trying to trap me. But I am inclined to think you're acting square!"

They sat down at the little wooden table and Granville began the conversation. He spoke kindly to Laxton, endeavouring to show him how foolish he had been to forfeit a good name and make himself an outlaw, liable to arrest and imprisonment; he told the fugitive that it would have been better to act like a man, to face the situation and appeal for time and assistance to make a fresh start.

"I am sure that you would have obtained what you wanted," concluded Granville. "And it is not too late now. What have you done with the money?"

"I paid some of it away for this business; it's a paying affair, and, although I am unfitted for the life, it will enable me to hide and to save money!"

"And then?" asked Granville. He was entering into the spirit of the thing; here was a chance of redeeming a fellow-creature, and he wished to do it. Bother Saunders' money! That was not the only consideration to bear in mind!

"It is my intention to pay all I owe!" responded Laxton slowly. "I could not do it up there on the lines I was working. I had no chance! I don't have to give bills with high interest now, because I have the money!"

"But you are always liable to discovery and arrest!" urged Granville. "No, I won't split. Let me persuade you to return and make amends."

"But I shall be run in all the same!" objected Laxton hesitatingly.

He was wavering, so Granville pressed the matter harder. It was a strange *rôle* for the solicitor to play! Saunders was the chief loser by the bankruptcy, about three-quarters of the money belonged to him, so if Laxton were to refund all he had decamped with, Saunders ought to be ready to consent to the withdrawal of the warrant, and to making things smooth for Laxton.

"I shall really be scoring on his account!" thought the future son-in-law. "I'll undertake to say that he will do as I wish!"

"Will you sell this business, return to the old place and refund the money if I undertake to assure you of your freedom and a chance of a fresh start?" asked Granville. "Come now, think of your good name, and ask yourself what the dear ones would think of you!"

The last appeal was effective. The man's eyes filled with tears and he wept like a child.

"I'll do it!" he declared finally. "It will take about a month to realise this business, but I'll sell it and go back as soon as possible!"

"Will you put that promise on paper?" demanded Granville.

"No!" cried Laxton firmly. "I give you my word. Have I asked you to put your promise on paper?"

Granville could make no reply to this. A few minutes later he left the shop and, escorted by Laxton, walked to the nearest better-class locality, where he secured a cab to convey him to his hotel.

The following Monday afternoon saw Granville back in his office again. The last scene of the bankruptcy case was enacted in a small hall about five weeks later, when the fugitive appeared for examination.

An arrangement had been arrived at whereby the warrant had been withdrawn, and it was expected that the final proceedings would not last long.

Laxton had paid back all the money with which he had decamped, and the creditors were unanimous in the decision to accept the debtor's proposal to pay them the remainder if they would allow him to start again.

Saunders, in his spite, would have pressed the matter against Laxton, had not Granville forced him to consent by pointing out that all would be lost if his undertaking were not backed up. Granville refused to tell anything about Laxton's hiding place till Saunders consented.

The examination did not last many minutes. Granville was one of the persons called; it was considered advisable, in order to create sympathy and favour for the unfortunate man, that the solicitor should narrate his visit to Laxton, and how Laxton had been induced to see his error and make restitution.

Granville was the hero of the hour; a man who could bring about such a change was worthy of all honour! Granville related what had taken place, but he studiously suppressed all reference to the struggle.

There was a murmur of applause as Granville concluded his evidence and turned to retire to his seat. The solicitor received a shock, however, when he heard himself recalled by the barrister who was watching the case for the Board of Trade. As Granville faced about, he could not help noticing that certain persons or groups of persons looked very knowing.

"Is it a fact, Mr. Granville, that the bankrupt, when you entered his shop, tried first to throttle, and then to shoot you?"

Granville turned ghastly pale. His eyes involuntarily sought those of Laxton, and he read in them an expression of such utter contempt that he felt annihilated. Both knew that if this were proved against Laxton he would be charged with attempted murder; he might get off lightly, but it would ruin his prospects. Moreover, it was a breach of his (Granville's) undertaking.

Further, it would be a blemish on his own reputation. How had it become known? Like a flash he remembered that he had told Winnie in the excitement of success; he had asked her to keep it a secret on the next day, but she had by that time most probably told her father, and he had told others. Laxton's contempt was to be interpreted as scorn for a man who tries to make himself a hero to his friends in spite of all his promises and professed good intentions!

"Surely, Mr. Granville, that is a very simple question! Either it is true or it is false!"

These words restored Granville's self-possession; prompt reply was necessary. He stood erect once more, calm and collected. He must keep his promise to Laxton at all costs.

"It is absolutely false!" he said firmly.

There were several cries of "Oh!" but Granville was so firm that his reply was accepted. Miss Winnie Saunders and her father hurried home, and the language of the latter towards his future son-in-law was decidedly uncomplimentary, to say the least of it!

"What a boaster!" raved Saunders. "He tells a pack of lies to make himself a hero. A hero indeed! He's as big a rascal as Laxton! And I've been telling people what a man of nerve my son-in-law is! Why, we shall be the laughing-stock of the place! It's abominable that a man should lower himself to tell such untruths!"

Poor Granville! He received a curt note from Winnie, breaking off the engagement; he could not protest, for he had done wrong. She believed that he had told a deliberate lie; so he had, although the circumstances were just the reverse of what she believed! Yet, what could he do? He had given his word to Laxton, whose salvation probably rested on his assurance being kept.

Granville lent Laxton a sum of money to help him to begin life anew in another town. He himself found it necessary to make a change a short time later.

"I did not tell her for the sake of boasting, far from it!" murmured Granville, as he gathered up the newspaper and letter. "It was an unfortunate circumstance. Who was to blame?"

Which question he found it impossible to answer. Can we answer it?

George Dayford.

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND, of Maitland Manor, Melton.
LADY MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's second wife. Before her marriage with him she passed as a widow named Mrs. Vernon.
JACK MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's son by his first wife.
AGNES MAITLAND } Jack's sisters.
MURIEL MAITLAND }
WOOLF MAITLAND, the present Lady Maitland's only child.
IVY STRANGE, a foundling with whom Jack is in love.
HERIOT NORTH, a friend of Sir Trevor.
MIKE HOLLAND, an ex-convict and burglar who blackmails Lady Maitland, he having been in prison with her first husband.
DIGBY SCARLETT, an explorer and acquaintance of Jack. It was through him that Lady Maitland's first husband was imprisoned.
GILBERT CHASE, a detective employed by Jack to discover the mystery of Ivy's birth.
VERNON GRANT, Lady Maitland's first husband.
NURSE BEAUMONT, who knew Lady Maitland previous to her second marriage.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Nurse Beaumont Writes a Letter.

"Nurse! Nurse! what month is it? And how long have I been lying here?"

"It's the first week in February, and you have been ill for nearly six weeks, Mr. Maitland," replied the low voice of Nurse Beaumont, as she moved the boy's pillows, and put a cooling drink to his lips.

"Nearly six weeks!" he echoed wearily. "I don't understand; it seems a year to me. Somehow I find a difficulty in remembering how I came to be here. Tell me what happened?" and he looked her calmly in the face, noting her perturbed manner and nervous hesitancy.

"Your head was hurt, sir!" she murmured softly; "but you're getting better now."

"My head!" he repeated wonderingly; "I don't remember it. How did it happen?"

The woman cast an anxious glance at him, afraid he should, by talking, learn too much, and so throw himself into a relapse. Nurse Beaumont had guessed much from the boy's ravings while in delirium, and she had dreaded his first hour of convalescence.

"Tell me," he reiterated impatiently, "when was I first taken ill?"

"On the night of the fancy dress ball, sir," she said soothingly. "There now, the doctor said as you were to keep quiet and not excite yourself!" she went on quickly. "Let me give you a little beef-tea, sir."

The invalid pushed her hand away. "Don't give me that stuff, now! I want to talk. Tell me, nurse, how was my head hurt? Did I fall?"

"No, sir; you were found shot in the wood on the night of the ball!" she repeated. "Do not talk so much, sir," she pleaded, "or you will undo all the good that has been done."

But her patient did not hear her. He was looking with a puzzled frown through the window, where the tops of the trees swayed and bowed under the breeze.

It was difficult to collect his thoughts; somehow they seemed to hang back and refuse to come at his bidding, when once they had trooped too rapidly into his brain. But now his sole sensation was one of extreme languor, he only wanted to lie and count the sunbeams that danced into the room on a fine day, or the raindrops that splashed against the panes.

Counting, always counting, until he fell asleep, and then to wake and begin once more. Surely there was something beyond it all! A world where people did more than count; where, perhaps, they laughed and sang, and loved——!

Loved! A thought sprang into his mind and drifted into a question that sparkled in his eyes and quivered on his mouth.

Loved! Why, there was someone he loved! He remembered now! Someone with violet eyes and hair bright like the sunbeams he had wearied of counting!

He sat up and beckoned the nurse to him. His eyes were shining and his face was flushed.

"Nurse! I want her!" he laughed softly. "She must have come often to see me when I was ill and could not speak to her; but now that I am better she stays away! Send for her, nurse, at once. I want her—my living sunbeam!"

"Who am I to send for, sir?" she said, with trembling lips.

The boy laughed. "Why, Ivy Strange, my sweetheart, nurse. Go quickly, and say I want her. I shall wait impatiently till you return with her. Go! Go!"

The woman hesitated. To refuse to do his bidding would throw him into a state of excitement that would be dangerous in his present condition; and, on the other hand, when she returned without Ivy Strange—as she must do—what explanation could she give? How stave off the tornado of questions that would follow?

She moved to the door slowly, the eyes of the boy in the bed following her eagerly.

"I will send someone to look for her, Mr. Maitland," she said. "I cannot leave the sick-room alone; but one of the maids is sure to be about."

"Don't be long, nurse," he replied. "I must see her. It will be better than all the tonics in the world to look at her face again!"

With a sigh Nurse Beaumont went into the corridor and cast a hasty glance round. There was no one in sight, and she softly made her way downstairs and knocked at the door of Lady Maitland's boudoir.

"Come in!" said the low, even tones of Sir Trevor's wife; and entering, the nurse stood in the presence of the beautiful woman whom she feared and wondered at each hour she spent under the roof of Maitland Manor.

"Your ladyship," she murmured, "Mr. Maitland is asking for—for her—Miss Ivy. What am I to do?"

Lady Maitland drew her brows thoughtfully together. She was looking especially lovely that afternoon, robed in a gown of white cloth that clung to her exquisite figure in lines of classic beauty, and her cheeks had lost none of their soft, dimpled curves in spite of the trying time of her stepson's illness.

"Have you said anything to him," she asked coldly, "that he should have mentioned the subject?"

"No, your ladyship," the woman replied. "He burst out with it quite sudden-like, and sent me to fetch her to him; and, oh, your ladyship," she went on hurriedly, "what *can* I tell him that will satisfy him without giving him a relapse?"

Lady Maitland rose slowly from the couch, and eyed the trembling woman before her with a tolerant smile.

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"You need tell him nothing, nurse," she said quietly. "I will follow you, and satisfy Mr. Maitland without exciting him. Of course, I am afraid that Miss Strange is lost now so far as he is concerned. She is either dead or worse—in the hands of the police!"

Nurse Beaumont looked at her with a strange expression.

"Then, your ladyship, you still believe that the mark I pointed out to you was nothing more than what you called a 'coincidence'?" she asked in a low voice. "Even then, your ladyship, I am certain I am right!"

"You may go now, nurse," said Lady Maitland, coldly ignoring the woman's speech completely, "and tell Mr. Maitland that I shall be with him in a few minutes."

With a last wondering look the woman turned and left the room, a curious expression on her mouth.

When she had gone Lady Maitland went to the escritoire in the window, and, unlocking it, took out a dried, yellow-looking paper she had not glanced at for some time.

"Child Dolores died, aged one year!"

She had received that brief statement when staying at Nice as Mrs. Vernon, nearly seventeen years ago, and it had given her much satisfaction, as the final cutting away of all the old moorings, leaving her safe and happy on the verge of a new life.

Now this nurse-woman, with her babbling tongue, had persisted in clinging to the idea that she had originally mooted, an idea that set the delicate teeth of her ladyship on edge, and sent a bitter gleam of hatred into her eyes. The woman was mad, and as soon as the boy upstairs could do without her services, she would see that Nurse Beaumont left the Manor.

"How I hope that wretched foundling girl has vanished for ever from our lives!" she murmured, relocking the desk. "She got away successfully, and even the efforts of the police have failed in tracing her. I wonder whether the river hides her secret?"

She left the room and presently stood by the side of the bed where Sir Trevor's son and heir lay.

He looked at her impatiently; a shade of disappointment crossing his face as he saw that his stepmother was alone.

"Where is Ivy?" he said, moving his head impatiently.

Lady Maitland turned to the nurse, who stood obedient in the room. "Nurse, will you please leave us?" she said softly. "I will not excite your patient too much, nor stay too long!"

The woman turned to do her bidding, and as her ladyship bent over the boy to kiss him she slipped swiftly behind a screen that was used to keep away the draught when people entered or left the room.

"Well, mater, you have something to tell me, I suppose?" said Jack, a weary inflection in his voice. "Is it anything concerning Ivy?"

Lady Maitland looked at him thoughtfully. He had evidently forgotten the incidents of the night of the *bal masqué* and the breaking of his engagement with the girl from the lodge. She would jog his memory just a trifle; not too much—that might bring about awkward consequences.

"Yes, dear," she said, placing one white hand upon the boy's brow, "it is concerning Ivy that I have come to see you; but you must promise not to excite yourself."

"Tell me," he interrupted quickly. "Don't keep me in suspense! What is it?"

She leant forward, her eyes searching the boy's white face that lay upturned on the pillow. "Ivy did not confide in me, as you know, Jack," she began. "She kept me outside her thoughts, and resented being asked any questions. But one thing she did tell me was that on the night of the ball she was engaged to Digby Scarlett!"

With an exclamation, the boy started up in bed and clutched his stepmother's white hand excitedly. His face had flushed, and the old fever-light shone in his eyes.

"Digby Scarlett! Can that be true, then?" he cried. "I fancied that I must have had some nightmare that confused those names together! Don't tell me that while I have been ill she has forgotten me!" and his eyes flashed piteously into the tender violet ones looking down upon him.

"I am afraid, dear," she murmured gently, "that there is yet something worse to tell you—something that may hurt your pride, yet at the same time show you where your love was misplaced."

She paused to watch the effect of her carefully-chosen words.

He moved his head restlessly, whilst his mouth quivered. "Nothing you can ever say will make me think that!" he said at last. "Whatever has happened, she once returned my love, and still possesses it. But tell me what you were going to say."

"Only this," his stepmother repeated softly, "the girl upon whom you have lavished so much affection left the Manor three weeks ago, leaving no address behind her."

"Well," said the boy impatiently, a warm moisture breaking out on his brow and on his smooth upper lip. "Why did she go? Who drove her—an innocent, country-bred girl, from her home? Tell me!"

He raised himself upon his pillows, and gazed steadily into the face of his father's wife.

Lady Maitland sighed softly, and murmured:

"It was a mystery, until I received this letter from Digby Scarlett this morning. He went to London some days ago—after Ivy Strange had left. I thought it odd at the time that he should neglect the pretty place he has taken so recently, to wander about London in this fearful weather, but his letter explains a great deal that puzzled me."

Jack put out his hand; it was shaking as though an icy blast had chilled the blood in his veins.

"Let me see!" he said hoarsely, his blue eyes blazing with passion. "I must know the worst!"

Silently she took the letter from the little jewelled bag at her waist and gave it to him, watching keenly the expressions that flitted across the boy's fair face.

The letter was short and crisp, containing but few lines, but they were lines that made the breath of Jack Maitland come from between his lips in quick-drawn gasps.

"Dear Lady Maitland," it began. "You will be pleased to hear that I have met Ivy in London, and we made arrangements to be married quietly, then leave for the south of France. She looks very happy.—Sincerely yours,

"Digby Scarlett."

He crushed it tightly in his hand, as he might have held the throat of the writer had they met.

"Married!" he murmured. "I can't believe that she would be so heartless. Oh, God, why did I wake to consciousness to hear this? I would rather have died believing in her!"

Suddenly he started up, and seizing his stepmother in a feverish grasp, he cried wildly: "You were right, after all, mater. She did not love me. It was—it was that man Scarlett! He won her from me while I lay a helpless log!"

He fell back upon the pillow with a laugh—a desolate echo of mirth that made the woman behind the screen shiver with fear for his reason.

Lady Maitland rose from the chair by the bed and looked at the boy who lay quite still, with the laugh lingering on his mouth.

"So he is convinced now!" she murmured. "Then he will trouble me no longer, and that—other has got the prize for which he worked! I have done my share of the compact! Now I am free—free—free!"

She glided from the room with a smile on her lips, and came face to face with Nurse Beaumont, who was entering to look after her charge.

"Ah, nurse," she said softly, "I have had my little chat with your patient. I was very quiet with him, but I am afraid he is just a trifle upset by the news I told him!"

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The nurse looked after her mistress thoughtfully. "Yes," she muttered, "and I don't wonder at the poor boy being upset in his weak condition at the news I heard you tell him! It was not right, and in spite of my holding my tongue about the past, I don't mean to let that poor young fellow's life be spoilt if I can help it!"

She bent over the boy and touched him lightly on the hand. It was clenched tightly round the letter which her ladyship had left with him and forgotten to take back. Nurse Beaumont looked at it curiously. She wondered what news it contained that had helped to upset him.

"Poor boy!" she said softly, "so she has told you about your little sweetheart having gone! I don't think though," she added under her breath, "that you were told what I know, and what her laydship *refuses* to know!"

Jack moved his head, then his eyes opened, and met those of the nurse close to his own.

"What's the use of trying to drag me back to life?" he said bitterly. "The incentive to live has gone now!"

She bent nearer to him, and whispered cautiously: "No, no, sir! The incentive to live has not gone! You owe it to the—young lady you love to get well and fight for her. She needs it, poor child—she needs it badly!"

He turned sharply to her, an eager, questioning look in his eyes: "What do you mean? Why do you speak in that way? What do you know, nurse?"

She cast a nervous glance at the door, then said softly: "Your sweetheart is in sore danger, sir, and you are the only one that can protect her. I have only been here since the day after the ball, but I have kept my eyes open and seen more than most people reckon. And I tell you that you are doing a sore wrong to that sweet child if you let her fall into the hands of those that wish her ill!

"Get well, sir; eat and drink what will put strength into you, for each drop of new life you gain will be a step towards her! And," she continued, "her life is in worse straits than yours, sir!"

Fired by her strange words and secret manner, the boy stretched out his long, white hand to the woman who had warned him.

"Nurse!" he exclaimed excitedly, "I was a weak, cowardly fool to have put my own feelings first, before those of the girl I love! But I will get better!" he cried. "Feed me up, and I will take everything and anything you like, so that I can be once more a man, to fight and to hold!"

As he fell back upon his pillows, exhausted by the unusual excitement, Nurse Beaumont placed her hand on his burning brow.

"Then go to sleep," she said authoritatively, "that is what you are to do; don't dare to speak another word, Mr. Maitland, because I shall not answer you!"

As he turned obediently on his side, the past that had eluded and puzzled his brain, came back in a flash of luminous light across the darkness that had fallen over his mental vision, and he remembered everything—the scene between himself and Ivy when she had said she loved him alone, but would marry Digby Scarlett.

Then the appointment between himself and his rival, to fight out their claims to the girl; after that his memory faltered, and he could only recollect the stroll through the woods to meet his enemy; then a cloud descended once more, blotting out everything save his love for his tender-eyed sweetheart, who wanted him to save her from some fearful trouble.

After a while Nurse Beaumont bent over the patient and saw that he had fallen into a quiet sleep. Then she softly took from between his fingers the letter he still possessed, and quickly read the brief message it contained, afterwards placing it back in his hand.

"There is something behind all this!" she murmured thoughtfully. "He knows, like everyone else, that a warrant was out for that poor young lady's arrest. Though I'm certain she's as innocent as the babe unborn! Then, if he knows it, why does he want to marry a girl the police are after?"

She shook her head, then sat down to write a letter to a friend whom she had left in London, on the eve of taking a new situation as housekeeper. Her note was brief, saying she expected to be back in London as soon as her patient was better; then she added: "I am inclosing a shilling for you to do me a favour, dear Eliza. Will you, when you are down the Strand way, call at Somerset House and ask to see the death certificate of Dolores Grant, died July 30th, about seventeen years ago? I will tell you all when we meet."

Then she sealed and addressed the letter to:

Mrs. Riley,
C/o Vernon Vivyan, Esq.,
The Retreat,
Surbiton,
London, S. W.

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

The Long Arm of Coincidence.

"Hallo, Chase! What are you doing in London? It's ages since I had the pleasure of gazing at your extremely expressive countenance, my respected colleague."

Gilbert Chase shook hands with the man who accosted him, the ghost of a smile relaxing his mouth.

"Yes, it is rather an age, George!" he said thoughtfully, turning to walk beside his companion. "I am in town investigating one or two points dealing with my present job!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the man who had stopped him—a big, red-haired individual, with a humorous face and a peculiarly soft voice. "I heard you had the Melton murder in hand. Making much headway with it?"

His fellow-colleague smiled. "I fancy I am getting together one or two links. It is not an ordinary case."

The two went into the "Marble Halls" in the Strand, and sat down to drink their respective healths.

"Talking of out-of-the-way cases," said Frank George thoughtfully, "guess who I met the other day?"

Gilbert Chase shook his head.

"Can't imagine."

"Why, that old gentleman 'lag' who got fifteen 'stretch' for forging his pal's name, and was released on his ticket some few years ago. You remember him, because you were the junior who helped to arrest him—Vernon Grant was his name."

"Ah," said his friend slowly, "I remember, of course. What was he doing? Anything shady?"

The other shook his head. "No; he was looking quite the gentleman, spruce and well-to-do, and not in a suspicious way either, like most of the old hands when they get on a new 'lay,' but in an open sort of style. I had my doubts at the time," he went on musingly, "that there was a little foul play over that case, but it never came out, so I suppose it was the ordinary thing."

Gilbert Chase laughed cynically.

"Why, George! you're getting softening of the brain, aren't you, to go out of your way praising an old lag?"

"P'raps I am!" his friend said, with a slight flush. "Anyway," he added, rising from the table, "you've got your work cut out, old chap, to get hold of that missing girl. She seems to have vanished, so far as all trace of her can be found."

"Yes," answered Chase slowly, "the earth swallows some people up in a most mysterious way. But I don't despair—yet. It's early days for that."

As the two men parted, the thoughts of the man who was still hopeful of finding Ivy Strange drifted back to the old case which his colleague had re-opened—the forgery case in which Digby Scarlett had been the prosecutor, eighteen years ago.

Suddenly he quickened his steps. "It may lead to nothing," he muttered, "and, on the other hand, it may help me to form some idea of the character of the man who prosecuted. I've got a

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feeling that the master of the 'Rest' needs careful knowing, and any insight I can get into his personality will satisfy my professional curiosity, and throw some light on his present attitude. I have not forgotten that the missing girl was the bone of contention between him and poor Mr. Maitland!"

He hurried to the British Museum and hunted up all the old files of the *Monograph* of eighteen years ago, with dogged perseverance, until he found what he wanted. Then carefully, and with an absorbing interest, he read all that was printed regarding what had been a criminal *cause célèbre* at the time.

"Well," he muttered, closing the files thoughtfully, "in reading that over in the cold light of reason with the picture of the man before me as he is to-day, I'm almost inclined to agree with old George, and say that the poor wretch Grant was a cruelly-wronged man; and yet, there must have been some motive for the other to have plotted so diabolically—if he did, that is."

Seized with a sudden idea, he turned over the files of a Sunday paper of the same date, containing the usual sketches of the prosecutor, defendant, and other people closely concerned in the case.

As he glanced at the distorted faces in the paper that bore but slight resemblance to the originals, he started violently, as he came across one of a girl; underneath the sketch were the words: "Prisoner's bride, Margaret Grant."

"Great Jupiter!" he muttered, a thrill of excitement making him breathe quickly; "I must be off my 'nut,' or else I have come across a regular find that fairly takes me by surprise!"

He bent intently over the face in the paper that fascinated and baffled him at the same time. It was that of a girl with a strangely imperious beauty; but it was not so much the beauty that startled the detective as the fact that he had but recently seen a similar face that might almost have been the twin to that in the Sunday paper.

"Let me think!" he muttered; "this will take careful handling; it's a delicate subject. I must not miss one single point as I trace it, for I have to unravel two mysteries with one clue!"

He turned over the pages, again reading minutely the description of the couple on their honeymoon when the prisoner was arrested. They had been married, so the paper said, just one month; then that would make the wedding take place about the end of October, as the man, Vernon Grant, was arrested about the end of November, at the address of a Mrs. Phillpot, in Ennismore Gardens, West Kensington, whose first-floor he and his bride had taken.

"Mrs. Phillpot, 14 Ennismore Gardens, West Kensington," he murmured, scribbling the address in a note-book. "I will see if she can help me, since there is no other address in the paper, and she won't remember my face by this time as one of the men who took him away. But I can't understand, all the same," he mused, "why this sketch should be the living image of that other woman—unless—unless——" and he chuckled grimly as he closed the heavy files, "unless I am on the trail of a very interesting discovery!"

Half an hour later he was in the sitting-room on the first-floor of No. 14 Ennismore Gardens, speaking to the same plump, motherly-looking woman who only a few weeks before had been questioned by Digby Scarlett.

"I can only tell you, sir," she said, "that poor Mrs. Grant left me about a year after her husband was put away. She and her little baby girl went with the nurse; the only address I knew being Southampton. After that I heard no more about them until the poor young thing's brother came to see me last December."

Gilbert Chase opened his eyes. "Let me see," he said thoughtfully, "was he a fair, bald-headed man, with a red beard?"

"Gracious, no, sir!" Mrs. Phillpot replied. "He was from America, he told me, and asked just the same questions as you are asking now. And as for being fair, he was tall and very dark, with black eyes, and a long moustache, and very beautiful teeth that any lady might envy—quite a gentleman, he was."

"Ah! you don't remember this brother's name, do you?" he asked carelessly.

She puckered her brows thoughtfully. "I can't say as I can, sir," she said apologetically; "I only know as it was a name like 'Rigby,' then another like some colour. But what it was, I can't for the life of me remember; I was always a bad one for names."

"I wonder," he said, pressing a sovereign into her hand, as he prepared to depart, "whether Mrs. Grant left a photo of herself with you? It will be most useful if you have one, on account of the uncertainty I have in tracing the lady."

"Now I come to think of it, sir," Mrs. Phillpot murmured, "I fancy there was a picture left in a book Mrs. Grant had given to me when she was packing. I put it in a frame, and in the different spring-cleanings it has got mislaid by now, but I will go and see if it is in the box that I keep my old pictures in."

She left the room, and Gilbert Chase smiled grimly.

"Although I am not searching for Ivy Strange I am getting at the root of a much more subtle mystery! So it was a gentleman whose first name was 'Rigby,' and whose second sounded like some 'colour'! I fancy I could very easily guess those two names correctly!"

He glanced round the room thoughtfully. On the book-shelf were several volumes that looked like the reference-books that abound in the apartments of landladies. He took one down—the oldest and most shabby, and turned over the pages quickly. They were faded and yellow, almost dropping out of their binding, but as he quickly scanned them he saw one that made him hold his breath.

It was the usual stereotyped recommendation:

"*Mrs. Phillpot has been more kind to me during my stay with her than can ever be repaid with money. 'Speech is silver, but silence is indeed gold.*" (Then followed the signature of the writer of the flattering words.)—"Margaret Grant."

With a quick glance towards the door Gilbert Chase tore this page out of the book and slipped it into his pocket. Then he replaced the volume on the shelf, as Mrs. Phillpot entered the room with a triumphant smile upon her face.

"At last, sir!" she gasped. "Just when I was afraid it was lost! It had slipped behind some books in the box."

He snatched it eagerly, and for a moment could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes.

The face of the girl-bride of the convicted ex-convict of eighteen years ago was the image of the girl now wanted by the police on a charge of murder, or complicity of murder!

He looked again, keenly, and with an almost painful intensity. The face in the faded photo. was colder and prouder in expression than that of the girl Ivy Strange; yet, at first sight, the similarity was startling, and set a train of thoughts running in the detective's mind, suggesting weird possibilities of a great mystery of which he alone appeared to hold the key.

He thanked Mrs. Phillpot for assisting him, and promising to return the photo. when he had had it copied, he ran quickly down the steps and hailed the first hansom he saw.

His blood was boiling with suppressed excitement, and in the usually vacant blue eyes a gleam flickered that would have startled some people had they seen it. He put the photograph in his pocket-book, then took out the piece of paper that had lain forgotten among the musty books on the shelf so many years, until spotted by his professional eye.

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He read the brief commendation thoughtfully three times, conning each word, and even letter, with microscopic attention. Then he again turned to another division of his pocket-book and drew out three tiny scraps of paper which he had puzzled over for some weeks, and compared two of the pieces with two words written on the sheet of paper.

They were, strangely enough, the same in either case; "silence" and "money," and as he glanced at them, Gilbert Chase drew a long, satisfied sigh.

"It's very odd," he muttered, "they are so much alike that they might even have been written by the same hand. Yes, in spite of the lapse of time, there is the sign of similar formation in the letters! It's another proof of the long arm of coincidence.

"I am glad I did not leave those important bits of paper at the 'New Age'; they were trifling evidence before, but now"—and he closed his eyes thoughtfully—"now they have become a clue of double importance. I am glad I met George. I owe him a debt of gratitude he will never know for sending my thoughts back to that old case. Now to return to Melton, and interview one or two of my old friends!"

As he stood on the platform at St. Pancras, waiting for the train to fill up, a man brushed against him roughly and passed on without troubling to apologise. With a frown Gilbert Chase glanced at him, then raised his eyebrows in momentary recognition. The man hurrying towards the first-class carriages of the train, and looking with an ugly scowl upon everyone in his path, was Digby Scarlett.

"He looks as though he had had bad news," said the detective grimly. "He would look worse if he knew where I had been!"

At that moment a telegraph boy came running quickly alongside the train, a telegram in his hand.

"Are you Mr. Digby Scarlett, sir?" panted the boy.

Quick as lightning came the detective's reply. "Yes," he said coolly, throwing a shilling to the youth, "I am expecting a telegram."

Then, with gentle finger, he opened the orange-tinted envelope. It was dated from Rotherhithe and contained the brief message:

"*Plant successful. 'V.' drowned accidentally. Send money.*—LAMPITT."

THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Like Sweet Bells Jangled.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND'S beautiful wife gazed thoughtfully from her boudoir window out where the bare trees stood sentinel on either side of the drive, and the fresh presence of Spring in the air was as balm after the cutting winds of January.

Pearl Maitland was happy, with a proud sense of victory in her happiness, for she had overridden obstacles before which other women would have stood aghast.

Her inimitable audacity had steered her through a storm of suspicion that would have caused even a stouter heart than hers to quail before such terrible odds. But she had come through all with flying colours.

In each encounter she had outwitted the enemy, and now it was with a sense of relief and joy that she sat thinking about the future.

Nurse Beaumont had left, and Lady Maitland smiled slightly as she remembered how she had intercepted a letter that estimable woman had left on the table to go with the post-bag.

She had distrusted her somehow, in spite of her silence concerning their past connection, and seeing this letter, had confiscated it, made herself acquainted with the contents; then, smiling grimly, had flung it in the fire. "So much for Nurse Beaumont!" she had said.

Now that Digby Scarlett had gained his wish she was free to pick up the threads of her life where she had laid them down in order to fight a silent, strenuous battle for the sake of her boy.

Her secret was doubly a secret now, since she had drawn the claws of her enemies—except those of Agnes!

Then she laughed softly. After all, what could Agnes do? It was some time since she had mentioned the man whom she had met at the house of her friend, and probably, seeing that her shaft had fallen flat, had forgotten the incident.

"Yes; now I will forget the past three months of horror!" she murmured, picking up the book she had held loosely on her knee.

It was by a new author, and attracted her both on account of the strong, human note it revealed, and the fact that the writer had the same name as that on the envelope Nurse Beaumont had written to her friend in London.

Suddenly the door opened, then closed softly.

"Is that you, Trevor?" she said lazily, without turning her head.

"No, Lady Maitland," answered the intruder. "It is I—Heriot North."

Something—a note of aloofness in the voice of the man who shared with her part knowledge of a midnight rendezvous—sent a thrill of fear through her. Had she miscalculated her security after all?

"I am glad you have come to see me!" she said brightly. 'I was wondering if you had gone to town."

"I did not go to town," he said coldly. "I stayed away because I could not come!"

"Could not come?" she repeated, her breath quickening; "what do you mean?"

He came nearer to her, yet she noticed that he avoided touching her. "I mean," he said, in a low, intense voice, "that I was tricked and deceived by you that other afternoon, when you told me your version of what happened in the wood. I believed you implicitly! Oh, Heaven!" he cried passionately, "I forged my soul to yours in a bond of silence that I *must* keep now! And you let me—you let me vow fidelity to a lie—to knit myself to a——"

She raised her hand with a sudden imperious gesture.

"Hush, you madman! Not so loud! Explain yourself!"

He drew his hand across his mouth; it was wet, and quivered like a child's.

"There *was* a woman in the wood that night," he said slowly, "a woman with black hair! You knew it, and you lied to me with a smile on your lips!"

She looked at him curiously. In spite of anything he said to her she felt that he would not betray her! He would rather die first!

She pushed back a stray wisp of hair; it was damp with sudden moisture.

"How did you learn—that?" she said softly.

"How?" he returned bitterly. "Can a man close his ears to what is a common subject wherever he goes? It was scarcely a whisper at first, then it grew into a positive statement. I heard how the detective had caught the wrist of a woman, upon whose arm he had left a bruise. Then—then I remembered the band of black velvet you had worn round your wrist for some days since the night of the *bal masqué*. And my eyes were opened!"

She went up to him swiftly, and in the firelight her face looked strangely lovely.

"And because of that—Heriot," she murmured softly, "you hurl your condemnation on my head! Is it fair to listen to such reports, and then—because you had my entire confidence—to jump to such hasty conclusions? I thought you would be true to your vow for ever."

He shuddered. "Yes; to my vow of silence I must be true; but the ideal to which I clung has crumbled! You admit that the story you told me was false, then?" and he unconsciously gripped the back of a chair in his eagerness to learn that there was some particular he could still believe.

"The story I told you about that man possessing a secret of my dead husband, was true!" she began slowly. "I have told you the truth, so far as you were entitled to it! Now,"

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and she drew herself up haughtily, "what more is there that you wish cleared up? You have heard both accounts—which do you believe, mine or the other?

"I repeat," she continued, after seeing that he was still silent, "that I saw no one else in the wood that night. What reason would I have for an unnecessary lie? Come! who has been trying to poison your mind against me, when I have learnt so nearly to rely upon your strength, to trust to your—your regard!" The last word she breathed so softly that it barely reached him.

He flushed guiltily. The subtle influence her beauty exercised over him was once more beginning to draw his strength from him, like the fumes of a noxious flower.

"No one has poisoned my mind," he said quickly. "As I said, I heard reports about a woman in the wood. Men talk among themselves idly, and in view of the bond between us—knowing what I did—perhaps I may have jumped to a hasty conclusion."

"Men?" she murmured thoughtfully. "What men?"

"Oh, I heard Digby Scarlett discussing the affair some days ago," he replied, "but now that you have convinced me that you were not the woman about whom is all this wonder and suspicion, I do not care who she was. I fear I am impulsive," he went on, feeling he had made an exhibition of himself "but ever since I burnt those things for you I have been haunted by the fear of discovery—for your sake!"

She put out her hand. "Let me impress one thing upon you—avoid Digby Scarlett; he is a bad man, a false friend, and—I hate him!"

"Hate him!" he said, in surprise. "Why? Although I fancied I had met him somewhere before, I did not notice him much. Have you known him long?"

A curious expression crossed her face. "No; we met some few months ago—quite recently; but I have known him long enough to hate him!" she said, in a low, bitter tone.

"It is unfortunately true that listeners hear no good of themselves," said a suave, well-bred voice behind them—a voice that sent a cold shiver through Sir Trevor's wife, and chased the colour from her cheeks, as, sending a startled glance at the door, she and her companion saw in the flickering firelight the tall figure of Digby Scarlett, with a sinister, smiling expression on his mouth, looking from one to the other. He came forward slowly.

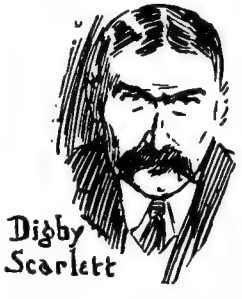
"I am afraid," he began, turning to Heriot North, who was gazing at him in an embarrassed silence, "that her ladyship made a slight error in saying she had known me for a few months only!" Then, addressing the cold, beautiful woman who faced him defiantly, he said: "Shall I say *how* long it is since we parted, Lady Maitland?"

Heriot North made a movement towards the man who had spoken such insolent words to the woman whose secret he shared.

"I wish to hear nothing that you can say," he replied curtly. "The length of Lady Maitland's acquaintance with you has no interest for me."

Digby Scarlett laughed.

"Not," he went on, "if I can tell you that it is eighteen years since this lady and myself parted! The occasion was tragic; the scene—a criminal court!"



He stopped abruptly, as Heriot North sprang forward and struck him across the mouth.

"You lie!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "You contemptible cur! Take back your words!"

Livid with rage, the other wiped his mouth, and when he withdrew his hand it was red.

"Lie!" he gasped; "you quixotic fool—look at that woman's face! Ask her if it is not true that she is a bigamist, with no right to the title of 'Lady Maitland!' Look at her trembling lips, and frightened eyes, then ask her 'ladyship' to relate about her marriage with a convicted felon still living!"

There was a pause, broken neither by the cornered woman, in her beauty, nor by the two passion-gripped men, but by a low, inarticulate sound that came from the door.

Instinctively they turned, and, tottering into the room, with a distorted face and foolish, babbling mouth, came Sir Trevor Maitland, the squire of Melton!

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No Danger!

She: "If you attempt to kiss me, I'll call mamma." He: "And what will happen then?" She: "Oh, nothing, for mamma isn't at home."

Different Kinds of Love.

Tom: "Women don't love men for what they really are, but for what they have done!" Kitty: "And men love women for what their fathers have done!"

Passing Away Time.

"What are you doing in here?" asked the other fellow who had just come in. "Just passing away the time," was the answer, as he handed his watch to the pawnbroker.

Not at all Strange.

Hicks: "Isn't it strange that while my hair is getting grey my moustache is not?" Mrs. Hicks: "Oh, I don't think so; your moustache is about twenty years younger, you know."

Qualities to be Inherited.

"I hope you appreciate the fact, sir, that in marrying my daughter you marry a large-hearted, generous girl." "I do, sir" (with emotion), "and I hope she inherits those qualities from her father."

Flattery Won the Day.

Ardent Suitor: "I lay my fortune at your feet." Fair Lady: "Fortune! I did not know you had money." Ardent Suitor: "I haven't much; but it takes very little to cover those tiny feet." He got her.

Not a Nice Mind.

She: "It can hardly be questioned that every woman is more or less of a mind reader." He: "Do you think you could read mine?" She: "I'd rather not. Mamma is a little particular as to the character of my reading."

Cheaper to Part.

Miranda (sobbing): "It is better in every way that we should part, dear Orlando." Orlando (in a choked voice): "Only in one way, dearest." Miranda: "Yes, beloved?" Orlando (overcome with emotion): "It is cheaper, darling."

Matters they Overlooked.

Syms: "Ah, my boy, you are to be envied. An artist's life is an ideal one. The affairs of everyday life do not engross you." Daubers (whose pictures do not sell): "Not a bit. Why, we sometimes entirely overlook such prosaic matters as breakfast and dinner."

Better Thus.

Miss Saged (to veterinary surgeon): "Oh, dear, Mr. Simpkins, I am so afraid dear little Fido is going to have rabies." Mr. Simpkins (after careful examination): "Indeed, miss, I don't see any signs of it." Miss Saged (caressing him—Fido): "But his poor dear little tongue is always hanging out of his mouth." Mr. Simpkins: "That, my dear madam, is in accordance with a merciful dispensation of Providence. You see if it hung out of his ear, he might experience some little difficulty in drinking."

A Religion Worth Embracing.

Kate: "No, Hattie does not attend any church; she says she is her own religion." Harry: "That is a religion I would like to embrace."

Impossible to Do it.

Doctor: "I would advise you to take a walk every morning before breakfast." Sappy: "But, doctor, I—ah—never get up until after bweakfast, y'know."

It was a Strong Fish.

Wife: "Are you sure you caught this fish?" Mr. Gayfello: "Of course." Wife: "It smells very strong." Mr. Gayfello: "Strong? I should say it was. It nearly pulled me overboard."

Both were Pretending.

Mrs. Smythe: "Before we were married you used to pretend that you liked to have me sit on your lap for an entire evening." Smythe: "Yes, and you used to pretend that you preferred to sit in a chair."

Moonlight was Cheaper.

"I'll woo thee in the moonlight," sang the lover to his girl, who was gazing fondly on him from the casement; "It's much cheaper than the gaslight," sang her father, the old churl, who was taking observations from the basement.

He was Absent-Minded.

He is a very absent-minded man, and was thinking earnestly when a light shower came on. "Jack," said the young woman with him, "why don't you put up your umbrella?" "I have tried to," he answered, "but I couldn't get a penny on it."

Too Much of a Good Thing.

"I believe in trying to put as good a face as possible on everything in times like these, Maria," said Mr. Billus, looking again at the bill that had just been brought in; "but it does seem to me that seventeen shillings for complexion wash in one month is putting it on a little too thick!"

He Ought to Know.

A clergyman, having performed the marriage ceremony for a couple, undertook to write out the usual marriage certificate, but, being in doubt as to the day of the month, he asked: "This is the ninth, is it not?" "Why, parson," said the blushing bride, "you do all my marrying, and you ought to remember that this is only the fourth."

No Tinge of Bitterness.

"Does it not throw a shade of bitterness into your heart in the autumn," she said, "to see the trees all leafless, and to hear the wind sighing for ever in mournful monotony? Does it not make you feel that there is too much that is bleak in the world?" "No," he answered, "it weally does not." "Why?" "Because my papa is in the coal business."

Couldn't Have Forgotten Anything.

When the train made its first stop after leaving home, Mr. Simkins, who had been in a brown study for several minutes, raised his eyes, which had a troubled look in them, and remarked: "My dear, are you sure we haven't forgotten anything?" "Of course we haven't," responded the good lady cheerfully. "I would have thought of it the minute the train started."

Too Willing.

"Dear me," he whispered, "do you think if I married you, your father would forgive us?" "I'm sure he would, dear," she asserted, softly. "And would he give us a house of our own?" "I know he would, dearest." "And would he give us enough to live beautifully on?" "I'm sure of it, Harry." "And would he take me into the firm?" "Certainly he would." "And let me run the business to suit myself?" "Of course he would, darling." She snuggled closely to his bosom, but he put her aside coldly. "I can never marry you," he said, hoarsely. "Your father is too willing to get you off his hands."

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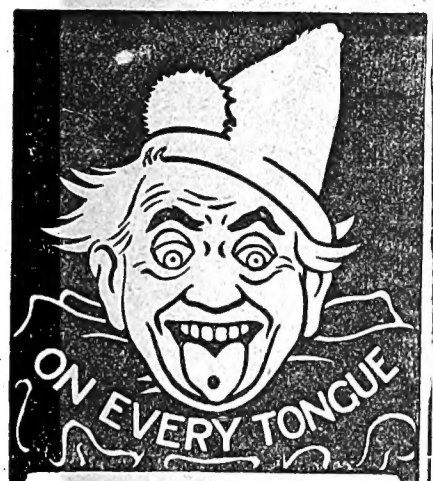

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Going to South Africa.

You are in love with a young man in South Africa, "QUEENIE," who wishes you to go out and join him there. Your parents object to your going so far away. You are very fond of him, and would like to go.

* * * * *

If he is in a good position in Africa, and could make you a good home, and has proved that he is fond of you, I should certainly accept his proposal. It would be better, though, if he could return for a little time, to be married at home, and to personally convince your parents as to his fitness to be your husband. Naturally they do not like the idea of your going so far away without being satisfied that all is as it should be.

❦❦❦

What to Do with the First Wedding Ring.

"A LADY who has become widowed at twenty-five," writes "ONE IN DOUBT," "has become engaged again two years after her husband's death. On her lover's next visit he wishes to give her a ring. She wants to know what should be done with her wedding ring under the circumstances. Should she cease wearing it?"

* * * * *

There is no known rule on this point. Opinions differ as to the disposal of the late wedding ring. However, I believe it is usual to continue wearing it until the day of the second marriage ceremony. Many women who have married in widowhood continue their first wedding ring for the rest of their lives, sometimes, however, transferring it to the other hand. However, it is usual to discontinue the first wedding ring on having the second placed on the hand.

❦❦❦

Troubles of a Careless Man.

"W. E. R." accepted an invitation to a party recently, but forgot the date and mislaid the invitation card. What could he do to get out of his dilemma?

* * * * *

I should find out from a mutual friend the date of the party. If, however, you do not know any other guest, there is nothing for it but to write a polite note to your hostess asking her to let you know the day, as you have mislaid the card. She will think it very careless of you, but that would be better than going on the wrong day or not appearing at all.

* * * * *

If you do not like to risk offending your hostess by writing to inquire the date, I should get out of it altogether by writing again saying that important business or something prevents your coming to the party. I am afraid the careless man is compelled to descend to many such fibs to make up for his faults.

The Introduction Question.

"ANXIOUS."—You see a girl about constantly, yet have not the courage to address her. You sit behind her at church, and her sister lives with her husband at your seaside town. How can you get the necessary introduction?

* * * * *

It should not be difficult to get acquainted with her sister's husband. I suppose he belongs to some club, or takes part in some local work, which ought to bring you easily into touch with him. That would lead to an introduction to his wife, and after that to the girl by whom you are so attracted

❦❦❦

And Again.

"A. E. W." wishes to get acquainted with a young lady, who lives near him. Would it be the proper thing for him to walk to the station with her in the mornings, if he bids her "Good-morning?" He finds it difficult to get to know her in any other way.

* * * * *

If the young lady shows an inclination to acknowledge your "good morning," there would be nothing against your speaking to her at greater length as time went on. That is for her to decide. Do not thrust your acquaintance on her, if she has not shown any desire herself to know you.

❦❦❦

Should Men Wear Rings?

"TROUBLED" is engaged to a girl, but is in doubt whether or not he should wear an engagement ring himself. What is the usual thing under the circumstances?

* * * * *

It is purely a matter of taste. Some men indulge in such fancies as rings and jewellery generally. These would certainly wear one on the occasion of their engagement, and his sweetheart, observing her lover's taste for rings, would probably present him with it.

* * * * *

On the other hand, many men dislike the idea of rings altogether, thinking them not only a trifle effeminate, but apt to interfere with any manual work or sport. These would be unlikely to wear an engagement ring. Personally, I have no opinion on the matter, as it is entirely a matter of taste and temperament. One thing, however, I might add, and that is that a display of many rings on a man's finger is not only vain, but vulgar.

❦❦❦

Finding One's Counterpart.

"MACFIE" writes: "How should I go about getting my counterpart in the female community? There must be a means, and I should think, from the way you write in 'In Confidence' that you are the one to answer it."

* * * * *

Thank you for your appreciation, "MACFIE." One's counterpart, of course, does not grow on wayside bushes, to be gathered by the seeking. The idea that every man has his "counterpart" is rather too much believed. The happiest marriages are between those who are by no means counterparts.

* * * * *

No doubt, looking on marriage as a sort of convenient arrangement, the counterpart is what is sought, but the question of love drives all such considerations out of the case. Do not go about speculating on which woman is your counterpart, because you will probably make the usual mistakes. Wives are rarely found by calculation. Wait till you meet a woman who inspires some deeper feeling, and then go into the question as to whether she has the qualities you look for.

Cynthia

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